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THE THINGS OF A CHILD

BY

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To my own Three
in Remembrance of Nursery Days
and their favourite story

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FOREWORD

In this little volume of reminiscences the events, if events they can be called, are not related in sequence, but just as they recur to my mind. I hope, first, that the book may please children, for in my own childhood I loved to hear what my elders did 'when they were little.' It is at least *real,* and children are great sticklers for the real, and are quick to detect and resent a false note, even when it is introduced for their special delectation. My second hope is that those who are interested in the rising generation may find something to appeal to them in these pages, for I have endeavoured to record exactly and faithfully the workings of the childish mind as exemplified in the occupants of our own nursery and schoolroom.

I venture to think that the following chapters differ from the openings of many autobiographies, the writers of these chronicles not seldom bringing their *adult* minds to bear on the events which they narrate, and verisimilitude suffering in consequence. Besides this unconscious aloofness of standpoint, there is often the tendency to present the central figure in an exaggerated or picturesque light. Certain faults and foibles are possibly suppressed, or again it may be magnified; motives

are dissected or inferred—whereas children often speak and act without any motive at all. I remember once overhearing a sedate grown-up interrogating a certain very small boy, who had been at immense pains to push all the animals of his Noah's Ark under the carpet on which he was sitting. The carpet was tightly nailed down, the small boy, moreover, was squatting close to the edge. He was obliged to insinuate each animal with extraordinary effort and precaution into the small space available. The result was not only dangerous to the unwary passer-by, but extremely detrimental to the fragile wooden legs of Noah's retinue. The lady pointed out these facts, and severely inquired the *reason* which actuated the proceeding. Of course the little fellow could put forward no reason, but I feel quite sure he resented the obtuseness which could not realise how delectable a thing it was to do. To hold one's breath, and heave one's chubby form sideways, and then with a dimpled but stubborn forefinger to poke the camel after the elephant—in a recumbent position, of course—and to follow up with the cow and the dog, the nose of each propelling the tail of its predecessor.

As years go by I find the big things of my life fuse in my memory; but the little things—the Things of a Child—stand out as vividly as though they had only just occurred.

And so I hope that these unmethodical jottings

may be of interest to those who are fond of children, and who like to study their idiosyncrasies and their queernesses. George Eliot, commenting on Tom Tulliver's attitude when patronised by his Uncle Pullet, draws attention to the fact that, while grown-up people imagine they are impressing the young, ten to one 'they are thinking you extremely queer.' But do these elders realise how very queer children are? Often their miniature minds are working ceaselessly at problems unguessed at by nurse or parents—in my case one of these problems dealt with the future destiny of my soul. When I was still so small that an ordinary chair, serving me as a table, supported my spelling-book and catechism, I remember poring over the latter dog's-eared volume and quaking with fear, sitting on my little stool, as I considered the depth of my own iniquity and the possibility of sharing the fate of the reprobate. This problem appeared to be solved when I reached the chapter dealing with the Sacraments, as I then resolved that just before I died I would be baptised over again, and would quickly depart for the next world before my new-found innocence could be tarnished. Sore was my disappointment, on turning the page, to discover that baptism could only be received once!

Children, like their elders, have their ambitions and their romances; the temperament which is to govern them for good or ill in after-life is there,

not dormant in chrysalis form, but active from the very outset. A child can be jealous before it can speak, revengeful while still in its nurse's arms; there are miniature Napoleons in petticoats, while the languishing glances cast—at grandpapa, perhaps—from behind Nana's neck by the little maid who has not yet cut her first tooth, augurs a future of conquest—or defeat. But if we bring our grown-up minds to bear on these facts we lose their full significance. Stevenson, looking back on his nursery days, describes the anguish with which he was filled at the prospect of becoming, one day, too big to play with soldiers, and dwells on the never-failing zest with which the morning porridge was consumed. He and his cousin imagined themselves explorers, now climbing mountain fastnesses (when the porridge was sprinkled with white sugar), now fording brown rivers of syrup.

It is Gustave Droz, I think, who depicts delightfully the four-year-old "general" in the Tuileries gardens who cuts so brave a flourish on an imaginary charger, and who, even when under the necessity of having his nose blown for him, continues to prance and caracole, without for one instant losing his sense of martial ardour.

George Eliot, too, describing how Maggie Tulliver ground her miserable fetish of a doll against the rough attic wall, or pushed the spick-and-span Lucy into a muddy pond, does not bring her analytical mind to bear on Maggie's motives:

she simply narrates the facts, and one feels their truth.

Without presumptuously claiming to emulate the skill of these masters, I will acknowledge that I have followed their methods. For all who would enter the garden of a child's mind must, like Alice in Wonderland, make themselves small enough to enter by the enchanted door, must, like her, go back for the little key.

M. B.

CHAPTER I

DOLLS AND BABIES

When I was a child we lived in a large, old, rambling Irish country-house, with long corridors, which were delightful to play in by daylight and terrifying at night. At one time our schoolroom was at the very furthest end of the least frequented of these corridors, and I well remember the agony of my small mind on being obliged to run past rows of doors, closed upon who knew what unknown mysteries, or, worse still, partly open and revealing depths of darkness within.

Our own corridor at the other side of the house was never alarming. We kept our toys and a varied collection of cherished possessions at the further end, and there was a big gas-lamp in the middle always lit as soon as dusk set in, and one could hear, while one played with bricks and nine-pins, the voices of the nurses as they chatted together over their work, or the still more cheerful bustle and clatter which proceeded from the kitchen premises, for opposite the gas-lamp were the back stairs.

Sometimes one of the under servants would

ascend these stairs and make admiring remarks on the cleverness of our talk and the ingenuity of our games. We thought them very pleasant and appreciative people. Occasionally the cook herself would come up, all in crackling, starched garments, and bringing with her a cheerful atmosphere of the good things she was preparing in her own quarters—which, by the way, we were strictly forbidden to visit. Now and then she would come armed with a little paper packet containing a small cake—one that, strangely enough, was 'over' from those she was preparing below—or a few macaroons, or a paper full of sugar fragments of what, in those days, we called 'Mary-Annes,' which I now realise must have been the outer cases of méringues.

We had three nurseries all in a row, and had also annexed the bath-room as our special property; the nurses, in fact, sitting there for choice—why, I never could discover. Our bread-and-milk and 'stirabout' were cooked on the bath-room fire, and the nurses made cakes, and, on rare occasions, butter-milk pancakes there, when we had deserved special treats.

A room higher up on the opposite side, and at the head of the kitchen stairs, was the linen-room—the special domain of the dear old housekeeper, who hardly did any housekeeping, and spent most of her time in the nursery. She had been my mother's nurse, and, in still earlier days, maid to

my grandmother, therefore she ruled supreme in our kingdom, having a firmness of character before which the nurse proper was invariably obliged to give way.

We were really six in number, but one was a brother so much older that he was sent to school while we girls were still in socks and pinafores, and the other, also a brother, was the baby of the family, and had a nurse and a nursery all to himself; though he and his attendant occasionally bestowed their company upon us in the middle room.

I remember one day we four girls—Gertie, Mollie, Nellie, and Aggie—were sitting in a row round the nursery fire, as near to it as a substantial guard would allow. There were very stringent rules on the subject of approaching to the fire. If we sat with our backs to it we were told the marrow of our bones would melt, while the direful consequences of inclining our heads towards its comfortable warmth, even on hair-washing mornings, were too awful to contemplate.

On this particular day, however, we had gathered round in various forbidden attitudes, and were debating with childish energy in the cheery glow, when, after a short pause, someone—I think it was Gertie—suddenly asked:

'Which do you love best, Mamma or God?'

There was a long and awe-struck silence, broken at last by myself—Mollie.

'Of course we ought to love God best;' then, gathering courage: 'I do love God best.'

'So do I,' said chubby little Nellie, opening big blue eyes with a virtuous air.

'Well,' said Gertie, 'I don't. I love Mamma best; how could anybody help loving Mamma best? I think it is very nasty of you, Mollie, not to love your own dear mother best.'

Aggie, a very small person, but one who from the earliest age possessed the most decided opinions, instantly seconded the last speaker, both in proclaiming the strength of her own natural affection and in scornfully reproving the cold-heartedness of the advocates for the other side.

Thereupon Nellie basely deserted me, and I was left alone, still clinging to my higher views—a kind of nursery martyr. This was all the more difficult, as I felt in my heart of hearts a yearning to join the ranks of the enemy.

Gertie looked at me contemptuously, clasping her hands round her bare knees, and nodding her curls emphatically.

'Even Baby will say he loves Mamma best,' she observed; 'won't you, Baby? Come here, Baby.'

Baby came trotting forward, with a somewhat uneven gait—at this period of his existence he wore, by preference, one shoe and sock in the pocket of his pinafore.

'Which do you love best?' asked Gertie solemnly; 'Mamma or God!'

After a moment's reflection Baby, who was then about three years old, answered decidedly; 'First I like Mamma, and then I like ham.'

* * * * * *

Aggie, who was two years older, had, as a rule, an almost excessive idea of reverence. I remember seeing her and Nellie talking together at the end of the corridor. Nellie had just begun to learn her catechism, and was giving herself airs in consequence.

'*You* haven't learnt it,' she was saying sharply. 'You don't know. But God did make you and me too.'

'Hush, Nellie!' cried Aggie, looking very much shocked; 'you mustn't say "God" like that; you ought to say "Mr. God."'

We were all, I think, very pious, and used to pray with the utmost confidence for anything we particularly wished for. My fervent nightly prayer for many months was the following:—

'Pray, God, make Dick and Serina build a nest, and grant that the eggs may hatch, and that the young ones may live.'

My petition was partially answered, for Serina did indeed build a nest, the sweetest nest you can possibly imagine, of pink and white cotton-wool, her labours being somewhat impeded by her husband, Dicky, who was a goldfinch of impish disposition, and who used to carry off beakfuls of the fluff she had so carefully prepared, and pull

it to pieces at the other side of the cage. However, the nest was at last finished and Serina laid five sky-blue eggs. As, after sitting on them for three weeks without result, she seemed in no hurry to leave her nest, I decided that canary's eggs must require more hatching than *The Boy's Own Book* thought necessary, and poor Serina was allowed to sit on undisturbed for another month, after which time she hopped off the nest herself; her poor little breast was perfectly bald, and all the eggs were addled. I was much disappointed, but consoled myself by praying for a pony instead.

Gertie's faith was of a still stronger nature. She confidently expected miracles to be performed for her special benefit.

One evening we were putting our dolls to bed in a corner of the nursery—our dolls were baby-dolls, at least they were dressed like baby-dolls, but I am sorry to say when their caps were taken off they did not look at all like babies, for they each possessed a great abundance of wax hair, painted a greyish colour (to imitate powder, I suppose), and adorned with an immovable black comb. That particular stamp of doll was much in vogue when I was a child, and was rendered still more objectionable by having kid arms, with horrible little flat, square, kid fingers sewn on at the end. These dollies of ours, however, did not have kid arms; a kind of empty pink canvas flap was gummed on at each side under the shoulder, at the farther

end of which flap dangled a little composition hand and arm, quite out of proportion to the size of the head, but still—more like the real thing. Legs and feet of the same description finished off the sawdust-stuffed lower limbs. Our nurses used to knit us tiny shoes with which to clothe these minute feet.

We each possessed a set of dolls' baby clothes that came on and off—little chemises which we had ourselves hemmed with many cobbled stitches and much pricking of the fingers; flannel binders, or 'swathes,' as we called them; long flannels; petticoats; and little robes complete. Somebody had given Gertie a miniature cloak and hood for *her* dolly; mine had outer garments of home manufacture, but very gorgeous: a white satin wadded cloak and a gathered bonnet of pink silk.

We had dolls' cradles which we never had patience to trim, but which were duly provided with mattresses and pillows, and, of course, sheets and blankets.

'They do look just like real babies,' said Gertie, as, having laid her treasure in its cot, she carefully tucked the covering round it.

'Wouldn't it be nice if they *were* real babies?' said I. 'It's such a long time to wait until we grow up and get married.'

'Mollie!' exclaimed Gertie. She squatted back on her heels and looked at me oddly. 'Mollie!

I have an idea—well, I really think it's an insp'ration!'

'What?' I cried breathlessly.

Gertie looked carefully round before she whispered in my ear: 'If we don't play with our dollies for a whole fortnight; if we don't even *look* at them; and if we pray very, very hard, I feel quite sure that in the end we'll find them turned into real babies.'

This *was* an idea; and when we considered what a wonderful act of self-denial it involved, it really seemed as if the thing might come to pass. As Gertie said: 'After all, if you pray hard enough, and the thing you ask for is not wrong, you nearly always get what you want; and it cannot be wrong to want to have two dear little babies of our own, though we are rather young!'

'No,' I said reflectively, 'that *couldn't* be wrong.' And then I scrambled to my feet and began to dance about and clap my hands. 'Oh, Gertie, only think, only think! Two little babies of our very own.'

'Sh-sh!' said Gertie. 'You mustn't tell anyone. I am sure if we don't keep it secret it won't happen. You mustn't dance about like that, Mollie. We'll have to be awfully, awfully good and sensible now, you know.'

I composed my features and tried to check my excitement.

'Now cover them up,' went on Gertie.

'Remember we mustn't even *look* at them till the fortnight is over.'

'Will it take a fortnight?' I asked. 'It seems so long—don't you think a week will do?'

'It will take quite a fortnight,' said Gertie firmly. 'You couldn't expect God to do it before that.'

I was rather ashamed, but still secretly felt that the period of probation would be very hard to bear.

'We shall be very busy, you know,' said Gertie presently. 'What's good enough for dolls won't be good enough for dear little real babies. We must get their clothes washed, and see if we can't coax Nurse Curley to let us have Baby's brush —the little soft first brush he had, you know, before he had any proper hair.'

'And we'd want a sponge,' said I. 'I expect our sponges will be too big.'

'I'll tell you what we'll do,' cried Gertie joyfully. 'We can have the slate sponge! A bit of rag would do just as well for washing the slates.'

We put the dolls very tenderly in their cradles, and, having carefully ascertained that the coast was clear, carried these cradles to the medicine cupboard at the upper end of our corridor. It was generally kept locked, but as, some time previously, Nellie had dropped Mobie's bunch of keys down a mouse-hole in the linen-room and had not yet revealed their whereabouts, the door

had had to be forced, and we were therefore able to open it cautiously. As a rule we disliked that cupboard because so many queer and horrid smells came from its carefully-arranged shelves—liniment, and squills and fennel water and a horrid, horrid jar of senna—they were all there, besides 'Manna,' which we did not object to, and a dreadful blue glass bottle, labelled 'Cold-Drawn Castor Oil,' the very sight of which made us shudder. The space below the bottom shelf contained a collection of pieces of brown paper and odd lengths of string, and it was here that we placed our dolls' cradles, covering them with a dust-sheet which we found on the lowest shelf. Then having shut the door we stole back to the nursery, feeling like two conspirators. Little indeed did the grown-ups know the delightful surprise which was in store for them, as well as for us! What would they say when we suddenly appeared, each with a dear little rosy baby in our arms?

On the following day we washed the slate sponge at the tap, wetting ourselves considerably during the process, and we should have proceeded to wash our dolls' clothes had not the nursery-maid, half from good nature, half from impatience, proposed to do so for us.

We were always questioning our nurses about the requirements of little babies—'little teeny-

weeny babies,' we would explain mysteriously, 'just born, you know.'

Our little brother's nurse, Mrs. Curley, whose favourite post was on the threshold of her nursery door, where she would stand, dandling her charge, and gossiping with any chance passer-by, gave us great concern one day, by declaring that little babies must always be dusted with violet powder after they were washed.

Violet powder! Our faces fell. Nobody in those days ever thought of powdering their faces, and the thing was unknown except in the nursery. But our little brother was considered too big to require its use.

'I s'pose you haven't any left?' inquired Gertie presently.

'Sorra a bit have I!' returned Nurse Curley, in her strong brogue. 'But what in the world would *you* be wantin' with vi'let powder? *You're* not babies.'

'No, but——' we looked at each other. 'Must little babies really *always* have violet powder?'

'Sure their skins 'ud be destroyed on them if they didn't,' replied Nurse Curley positively. 'Their skins is like rose leaves, and as aisy hurt.'

Shuzzey had no violet powder either, and wished to know what we wanted to mess about with violet powder for? We went to bed much dispirited, but next morning I clutched Gertie gleefully by the hand.

'Look, Gertie, look! There—in the grate! Don't you see? The wood ashes under the log. They are quite white and as fine as anything. That will be lovely to powder our babies with.'

'The very thing!' exclaimed Gertie.

We quickly jumped out of bed and collected the ashes in a little china pot, generally used for tooth powder, which we afterwards hid behind our chest of drawers.

What a long, long fortnight that was! Not only did our longing and expectation increase with every day, but we missed our usual games very much.

'Why don't you play with your doll, Miss Mollie?' Shuzzey would say. Or:—

'I wonder at you, Miss Gertie. I don't believe you've dressed your doll yet.'

'It wasn't worth while me washin' their clothes so nice,' the nursery-maid would complain.

'We're saving them up,' Gertie answered, with a meaning glance at me.

Then I nodded, and at the first opportunity we whispered together.

'*They* don't know, do they?' Gertie giggled.

'I wonder what they'll say.'

We began to assume little matronly airs, and to practise wearing shawls disposed cornerwise—mothers and nurses generally wore shawls in those days when they carried about young babies. I remember distinctly the comical appearance which

Gertie presented, with the point of her shawl dipping far below her white starched frock and pinafore.

Never had the days seemed so slow in passing. We prayed with the greatest fervour, and valiantly kept our resolution of not even approaching the cradles wherein our darlings lay; but it was a struggle to refrain, and on the last evening, the very last before that auspicious morn on which we expected to wake up mothers, my eager curiosity could no longer be restrained.

Creeping out of bed, I made my way along the corridor to the medicine cupboard, and opening the door, hastily passed my hand under my doll's blankets to feel if she were getting warm. Alas! Not only did my hand encounter the sawdust-stuffed body so familiar to its touch, but something else more grievous still. I uttered a cry which brought Gertie bounding from her bed.

'Oh, Gertie!' I shrieked; 'look!'—and I brandished aloft my treasure, from which, alas, one leg had dropped.

'You're a naughty, naughty, wicked girl!' cried Gertie, bursting into tears; 'to have gone and looked when we promised we wouldn't! Everything is spoiled now, and even'—with a momentary return of hope—'if the dollies do turn into real babies now, your child will be born without a leg.'

Next morning we woke up rather miserable.

'Nothing has happened,' said Gertie. 'We should have heard them cry.'

Nevertheless as soon as we were dressed we ran to the medicine cupboard; Gertie still faintly hopeful, while I was conscious of a medley of feelings, for I dreaded that, if the miracle had indeed come to pass, Gertie's prophecy would be fulfilled. But when we pulled out the cradles the occupants proved to be merely dolls just as before. The little pink and white faces on the pillows were hard and shiny; when we pulled the strings which caused their waxen lids to open, they looked back at us with cold glass eyes.

Gertie was convinced that the catastrophe was due to my breach of the compact. Still we had prayed so hard and had been so good that I could not feel that, if the dolls had really been undergoing the hoped-for change, such a little slip would have been punished so severely.

'I didn't look, Gertie,' I pleaded piteously, 'I only felt—I didn't think it was any harm!'

'If it wasn't harm why did your doll's leg drop off?' said Gertie severely. 'It dropped off of itself without anybody touching it.'

That did indeed seem like a judgment, though as a matter of fact I fancy the accident must have been caused by contact with the incautious hand of the nursery-maid, whose curiosity had certainly been aroused.

Loud and long were my lamentations; not only

was the disappointment, which was great in proportion to my hopes, aggravated by being told it was my own fault, but my plight was distinctly worse than Gertie's. Her dolly was at least as well as she ever had been, and my poor dolly had lost her leg.

By and bye Shuzzey came, followed hastily by Mobie. The lecture which Shuzzey had been about to deliver, on the score of our being 'at the medicine cupboard,' was cut short by the dear old housekeeper.

'What in the world is the child breaking her heart about? Is it that your dolly's got a broken leg? Sure what matter! You can go to Mr. Buggy in the shop, and he'll mend it for you as good as ever.'

Even Gertie revived somewhat at this prospect.

'Mollie,' she whispered, 'we can pretend your dolly has broken her leg like Miss Larkin, and Mr. Buggy can be the doctor.'

Later in the morning we sallied forth, all excitement, our dreams almost forgotten. I can picture the little procession now. Shuzzey always wore a very full-skirted long-waisted black stuff dress, with—when indoors—a black silk apron and a black lace cap ornamented with violet ribbon; these last two garments she now exchanged for a cloth cloak and a black bonnet, with a quilled border of white net in front, and a black silk curtain behind. Down the back stairs she went, leading Nellie, the

nursery-maid following with Aggie; while Nurse Curley, tempted by the prospect of a visit to the estate carpenter, also joined the expedition, carrying her charge, then about a year old. Gertie and I brought up the rear, Gertie dandling her doll, while I held my poor invalid very carefully wrapped up in a shawl.

It was quite nice to go down the kitchen stairs instead of the carpeted ones leading to the side door which opened into the garden. It was true, when you went out that way you passed by the pantry, and William sometimes presented you with a lump of sugar, and sometimes jumped at you from behind the door, pretending to be a bear—two equally hilarious proceedings; but it was still more delightful to go down 'the backiest back-stairs,' and halt a moment by the open kitchen door, where 'Macky,' the cook, dressed in her rustling green and white calico, would have a joke of her own with us.

'Make us a cake, Macky,' we would cry.

Then Mrs. McNally (to give her her proper title) would inquire what in the world we wanted with a cake, or suggest that maybe she didn't know how to make one, and we would laughingly retort or persuade, until Shuzzey came back to know why we were dawdling.

When you went out by the back door you found yourself in a large grass-grown yard, sheltered on two sides by the angle of the house, on another by

a high, high wall, all overgrown with blush roses in summer. I have never seen such roses as grew in the dairy yard, or looked upon such green, green grass. It was only cut occasionally, and from Miss Larkin's room one could hear the mower sharpening his scythe in the early morning. When she left her door open the pleasant sound could be heard all down our corridor, and the sweet smell of the newly-cut grass would come in too.

The fourth side of the square was occupied by the dairies, through the open door of which one could see marble shelves and beautiful pans of crinkled cream, and rolls of fresh butter, and piles of eggs. We passed through an archway between the dairy and the scullery, and found ourselves confronted with turf houses, the front walls of which were open rails, and a woodshed, and a big coal cellar that was always locked fast. We next came to the laundry where Mary Doyle and her satellites lived, and through the windows of which we could see piles and piles of our own little clothes.

To the left of the laundry was the stable-yard, and the path to the right led us round by the back of the loose-boxes which had high, narrow windows in the wall. We used to beg to be lifted up to peep through these windows, that we might look down at Whisker, my mother's pony, and the carriage horses. Sometimes we would push a cabbage leaf through the open slit of Whisker's box and he would turn round very quickly and roll

a wicked eye up at us until we dropped it, and then would pick it up and whisk back again to his own corner.

But on this particular day we had no time to feed Whisker, but filed along through the little iron gate next the loose-boxes, which led into the cow-yard.

The pigs lived at the lower end of the cow-yard, and we generally liked to rattle the iron gates of their styes, and call :

'Bocha, bocha, bocha!' which was what Bill Cay did when he brought the pigs their food. Then the pigs would rush out, grunting, and we would back away from the gates and laugh.

But on this occasion we were in too great a hurry to think about the pigs, or even to run across the yard to look at the stall-fed cattle, so huge and sleek and comfortable, chewing their cud as they stood in their thick straw beds—we hastened as fast as we could to the far end of the yard where the carpenter's shop was situated. It must, I think, have been originally intended for a loose-box, for you could look down on Mr. Buggy through a slit in the wall, just as you could look down at Whisker. But when you went round it, through the little gate and down some wooden steps, you found it a very snug place for a carpenter to work in. There were the high bench and all the fascinating tools, and the piles of wood, and the

planks against the walls, and the shavings and sawdust on the floor.

Mr. Buggy was a tall, thin man of about fifty, with a pale, pock-marked, good-natured face, kind blue eyes, and whitey-brown whiskers. He was indeed whitey-brown all over, as he wore corduroys, and I remember Gertie and I agreeing that this was because he lived with whitey-brown wood. He drove what he called a 'little ass-car,' in which he sometimes gave one of us 'a lift,' and was a great friend of ours, being frequently called upon to mend one of our little chairs or the furniture of our dolls' house.

'You're to be a doctor to-day, Mr. Buggy,' said Gertie, when we had climbed down the steps leading to his abode.

The nurses remained without, with the exception of Nurse Curley, who sat down with Baby on the top step, prepared to be humorous.

'A doctor, is it?' said Mr. Buggy. 'Well, what can I do for you?'

'Maybe ye'd like to cut off one of their legs, Mr. Buggy,' said Nurse Curley. 'That's what doctors does be doin'.'

'Hush!' said Shuzzey sternly. 'You'll be frightening the children. We want you to mend a leg and not take it off, Mr. Buggy. Miss Mary's doll has had an accident.'

I shyly produced the patient, being careful to keep the shawl tightly folded so that nothing

could be seen except the stump of the broken leg, from which the sawdust was rapidly escaping. Then I gave him the severed limb which I had previously held tight in my hot little hand.

Mr. Buggy clacked his tongue. 'Tch! tch! It's a bad case.'

'But you can mend it, doctor?' said Gertie admonishingly.

'I can so,' said Mr. Buggy hopefully. 'By the greatest good luck I have me glue-pot on.'

'Mind she doesn't bleed to death first,' said Nurse Curley from the top step. 'Look at all the sawdust runnin' out. Sure sawdust is doll's blood.'

We all thought Nurse Curley a very coarse woman, which indeed she was.

'That's aisy put right,' said Mr. Buggy.

He took my doll gently from me, tilted up the injured limb, and scooping up a handful of sawdust from the floor, soon filled the gaping canvas. Then, adjusting the leg itself with his big finger and thumb, he crossed the floor, shuffling in his whitey-brown boots which were never blacked, to the small stove on which the glue-pot was simmering. In a very few minutes the operation was performed and my dolly returned to me. But alas, the canvas thigh bore distinct traces of Mr. Buggy's black finger and thumb, while the glue made a brown line just below the little knee.

I thanked Mr. Buggy with seeming gratitude,

but with a sinking heart. It was not until Gertie revealed to me that she had accomplished something on her own account that I recovered my spirits. We were not allowed pockets, our handkerchiefs being firmly tied by one corner to our under petticoats with stout tapes, to prevent their being lost or used for unworthy purposes such as washing dolls' tea-things.

But Gertie had managed to tie up a large handful of sawdust in hers.

'We'll make linseed poultices with this,' she cried joyfully. 'If anything will cure Dolly's knee it will be a poultice.'

'Oh, yes, Gertie,' I agreed. 'And don't you think—don't you think she ought to have a powder? You know,' I went on, a little doubtfully, for I felt I was approaching a sore point, 'you know the wood ashes that we hid in our tooth-powder box—that would make lovely powder.'

I broke off, half afraid of having raised fresh regrets, for Gertie did not speak for a moment. Presently, however, her face cleared.

'Yes, we could do that,' she conceded. 'That little tiny coal-shovel that's in the doll's house would make a dear little spoon, and as your baby is so very, very little we needn't give it jam.'

CHAPTER II

CAKES

In my childish days our fare was of the plainest. Bread and milk for breakfast and supper, alternated with porridge (or 'stirabout,' as we called it); we had roast mutton and plain pudding for dinner at two o'clock; and milk, and bread and butter at five. A jug of milk and a loaf stood always ready on the nursery dresser, and we helped ourselves thereto whenever we felt inclined; but sweets and cakes were practically unknown.

Nevertheless, on certain high festive occasions we received a joint three-cornered note in our mother's writing, requesting, with a formality which made us feel very important, the pleasure of our company to tea in the library. At five o'clock, therefore, we sallied down, clad in our best white frocks, and found our mother presiding over a large round table—none of your gimcrack modern affairs—this had belonged to our grandfather; it had been cleared of books and photograph frames for the occasion, and now positively groaned with good cheer.

We all established ourselves round it. Miss

Larkin, our governess, wearing a crackling violet silk and her very best chenille net, her hair in front being very black and shining, and thereby hangs a tale!

We children were spotless and starched as to clothing, and politely expectant in demeanour—with the exception of Baby, who frankly drummed on the arms of his high chair, and otherwise betokened his eagerness to begin.

Those *were* cakes; how we ever survived them at our tender age I do not know, but, in those days, though children were not pampered, nobody ever troubled themselves much about their digestions. These cakes were large and three-cornered, with delightful black patches here and there, and, having been buttered while piping hot, were luscious to the last degree; but sometimes we devoured six or seven at a sitting.

Afterwards we played cards—'Old Maid' and 'Carry-my-Bundle'—an exciting but exasperating game somewhat resembling 'Grab'; or else my mother read out a chapter or two of Scott. We went to bed, happy and replete, at half-past eight, feeling we had been in a vortex of dissipation.

These treats, however, were of rare occurrence, and sometimes we suffered from a sinful hankering after the forbidden, and used to make cakes on our own account. Our mode of operation was extremely simple, and the result, as we thought, delicious. I give herewith the recipe—You take

a slice of the crumb of bread, the newer the better, plunge it hastily in the milk-jug when the nurse turns her back, squeeze it dry in a clean handkerchief, if you have access to the linen cupboard —if not, a corner of the towel will do—roll it round and round between the palms of your hands until it makes a nice compact ball, and put it to cook on the bar of the nursery grate. When quite black on one side it is generally done: take hold of it quickly and gingerly between finger and thumb, split it open, butter it and eat it while hot. A little sugar is an improvement, but this is sometimes difficult of attainment.

N.B.—If you offer this dainty to any grown-up person, it is as well not to tell them how it is made. Once, in the fullness of our hearts, we revealed to a certain maiden aunt of our mother's the method we had pursued in the concoction of one such little offering, generously bestowed upon her before she had unpacked her trunks. I will not divulge the result, but we never liked her so much afterwards.

One day Gertie, as usual, had an idea. She possessed a fertile imagination, but some of her plans were not altogether successful. It was winter, and she and I were sleeping alone in a little room adjoining the nursery. We had a fire, unprotected by any guard.

'Why,' asked Gertie, 'should we not get up

in the middle of the night and make a cake—a real, big, proper cake, boiled in a saucepan?'

The materials to be used were rather difficult to obtain, but we knew where the oatmeal was kept, and also the brown sugar; and Gertie had found a saucerful of freshly-made paste, with which Miss Larkin had been mending our music. She had dipped her fingers into this and thought it delicious. All these ingredients mixed together and well boiled would, we considered, make an extremely satisfactory cake; and we took, moreover, an unholy delight in the thought of the wicked daring of the enterprise.

A day or two passed, however, before we could carry out our plans, but meanwhile we contrived to hide the saucepan in a dark corner under my bed, and to help ourselves to the sugar and oatmeal. Meanwhile the paste had gone a little stale, but, as we intended to scrape off the top, we hoped the rest would be fit for use.

At last the opportunity came. We were put to bed as usual and waited anxiously for the remainder of the household to retire to rest. We had coaxed the nursery-maid to make up the fire before she left us, and for what seemed to be an endless time we watched the leaping flames, and saw the glowing places in the centre widen and brighten. A distant clatter of plates warned us that the nurses were still at supper, and we heard Miss Larkin go to her room.

At length, however, all was still, except for the crackling of the fire. A little red place in the middle suddenly collapsed and the coals fell together; if we did not soon get to work there would be no fire with which to cook our cake.

'Mollie,' said Gertie in solemn tones, 'it must be at least twelve o'clock. Everybody *must* be sound asleep by this time. Get up, or it will be too late to do anything.'

I got up, trembling with excitement, and produced the materials from under my bed. After digging up the fire with a bit of stick, we proceeded to mix them.

'First the paste,' said Gertie; 'skim off all that greeny stuff to begin with; the rest is quite good.'

'Oh, Gertie,' I pleaded, doubtfully, 'I don't think it *can* be nice.'

She inspected it by the light of the fire, and then applied her finger-tip.

'It's nice,' she affirmed, after thoughtfully sucking the end of this finger. 'I call this quite delicious. Now, Mollie, you sift in the oatmeal and sugar while I stir the paste.'

I complied, and after prolonged sifting and stirring, varied by occasional 'tastes,' all the ingredients were set on the fire to boil. This we assumed to be the proper method of making a cake, and as a strong odour of burnt oatmeal soon diffused itself through the room, we felt very business-like indeed

There we sat in our little white nightgowns, squatting back on our bare heels, every now and then bending over the saucepan to inspect the brown mess within. Convinced as we were that it was past midnight—though in reality it was nearly three hours before that time—and that the whole household was plunged in slumber, we permitted our tongues to wag freely, soon forgetting to speak in whispers, and even breaking into bursts of laughter.

All at once, however, our mirth was brought to an untimely end by the ominous opening of a door half-way down the long corridor—Miss Larkin's door. We were too much paralysed with fright to think of deceiving her, though it would have been easy to take a flying leap, each into her own little bed, and there to feign sleep. But no—we sat still, staring at each other with round, alarmed eyes, while the proof of our wickedness smoked on, ready to betray us by its evil smell, even should Miss Larkin's sharp eyes fail to detect the saucepan on its perch amid the glowing embers.

All down the passage came Miss Larkin's tread —stump, *stump;* stump, *stump*—there was no mistaking it. She had broken her leg some time previously, and walked much more heavily on one foot than on the other. And now the door was flung open, and Miss Larkin herself appeared. To our great surprise she was fully dressed, and the lights in the passage were not yet extinguished.

There we sat, squatting on the hearthrug, still round-eyed and breathless, but staring at her instead of at each other.

'What is the meaning of this?' said Miss Larkin, severely. 'Do you know that it is past nine o'clock?'

'Only nine o'clock?' We were immeasurably crestfallen.

'What are you doing?' she pursued, as the aroma of our concoction suddenly greeted her nostrils.

We remained quaking and silent, unable to bring ourselves to divulge our secret to Miss Larkin's unsympathetic ears. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the saucepan, and in another moment, with an expression of deep disgust, she was examining the contents.

'What is this horrible mess?' she asked.

Mess, indeed! If she only knew all the beautiful things that were mixed there together, and what a triumph our cake would have been when complete. We looked at each other indignantly, but said nothing.

'Well, you are both extremely naughty children,' she pursued; 'but it is too late to speak to you now. Go back to bed at once, and I shall have something to say to you in the morning.'

She closed the door behind her, and we heard the stump, *stump;* stump, *stump* of her retreating footsteps all the way back to her room again. It

was not until the sound had died away that Gertie ventured to speak. Her voice sounded tearful but unrepentant.

'Why, oh why did she take the saucepan with her?'

Next morning we felt a little nervous on entering the schoolroom, and Miss Larkin received us with an awful politeness infinitely more disconcerting than a severe scolding.

'Good morning, young ladies,' she remarked as we entered backing against each other, and gazing at her, each with a feeble and flickering smile. 'A penny off each!'

This was a heavy fine—a third of my sister's weekly income; half, alack, of mine was reft from us at one fell swoop. Our faces fell, but this was not all. Throughout that day Miss Larkin continued to treat us with that peculiar affectionate formality—if I may use such a term—which was in her a sign of the deepest displeasure.

She called us 'darling' in a tone which petrified us; 'dear' was already a token of the fall of the moral thermometer, but 'darling' meant that it had sunk to freezing-point.

Whenever, throughout that dismal day, we were inclined to forget that we were in disgrace, and to make some little joke, or some trifling inquiry in our ordinary cheerful tones, we were instantly recalled to a sense of our iniquities by a 'Gertie,

darling," or 'Mary, my dear,' coupled with a reminder of 'what happened last night.'

Being very affectionate children, and disliking exceedingly the feeling of being thus held at arms' length, we implored forgiveness with tears, but were invariably told that though Miss Larkin could forgive she could not forget.

She was, however, really a kind old soul, and used often to join in our games with as much zest as her stout figure and stiff leg would allow, and to tell us stories 'out of her head.'

It was on one winter's day when we were walking in the garden that we first made the acquaintance of 'Mary Catherine.'

How we hated walking in the garden, particularly in winter! We were not allowed to dig in our own little flower-beds, and we soon got tired of trundling our hoops, or 'playing horses,' for in winter we wore such a number of clothes, one over the other, that we could hardly move. What with gaiters, and flannel spencers, and 'inside jackets,' and a horrible outer garment called a pelisse, which buttoned behind, and had a detachable cape which buttoned in front, and was always swinging round to one side so that one arm was cold and the other couldn't be lifted; and hats which were tied under our chins, with rosettes at each ear—our lives in winter were a burden to us. We used to trail up and down the gravel paths without even the excitement of finding a snail in the box edging, or a

caterpillar among the broccoli. On this particular day when Miss Larkin suddenly proposed to tell us a story, we gathered round her at once, the two nearest to her clutching her hands, while the others clung to her ample skirts. I can see now how her crinoline tilted up in front under these circumstances.

'Out of your head,' we pleaded. '*Do* let it be out of your head.'

'Well,' said Miss Larkin dubiously, 'once upon a time there was a little girl'—

'What was her name?' I interrupted eagerly.

'Her name,' replied Miss Larkin, after a reflective pause, 'was Mary Catherine.'

Mary Catherine! The name appealed at once to our imaginations. Our mother sometimes told us about a little girl called Fanny, while the heroines of the story-books with which we were most familiar just then were Ellen and Daisy—Mary Catherine was distinctly original.

'And did she ever go to a party?' asked Gertie. (Fanny sometimes went to parties.)

Miss Larkin considered; she was not an imaginative person, and it was with immense difficulty that she brought her mind to bear on the social aspect of Mary Catherine.

'Yes,' she said, after a pause; 'she did. One party.'

'And what did she wear?' I asked, almost

tumbling over Nellie, who was the lucky possessor of Miss Larkin's hand.

'Do let her wear pink,' pleaded Gertie—'a pink silk dress, Miss Larkin.'

'Not silk,' said Miss Larkin firmly. 'Mary Catherine went to a party in a pink muslin dress.'

We readjusted our ideas hastily: hitherto our heroines had always worn shining raiment on special occasions. But still, as Gertie said, pink muslin may have been pretty.

''S'ar,' cried I ('S'ar was the diminutive only permitted when Miss Larkin was in a very good humour), ''S'ar, couldn't she wear a wreath of pink roses?'

She looked round with a smile of amusement: 'Oh, my dear! Little girls don't wear wreaths.'

Gertie giggled too, and even the little ones echoed her 'Of course not!'

I felt I had displayed lamentable ignorance, and was relieved when Nellie inquired: 'But what did she wear in her hair?'

'She wore,' said Miss Larkin, after a further mental effort, 'a very nice piece of pink elastic.'

We all sighed with satisfaction—after all, as Nellie said, pink elastic was more real.

'And so she went to the party,' continued Miss Larkin, with a kind of amiable indecision, 'and —and she enjoyed herself very much.'

'What was there to eat?' asked Gertie.

'There were cakes,' said Miss Larkin, 'and—

and '—here she probably recalled some of the festivities of her own past, 'negus and—egg-flip and—sweetmeats of all description.'

We exchanged gratified glances: the word 'sweetmeats' conveyed an idea of things rare and luscious.

After this effort Miss Larkin's inventive powers came to a temporary standstill until she was prompted by Nellie, who emerged out of a brown study in which she had feasted with Mary Catherine in imagination.

'And what else did Mary Catherine do at the party?' asked Nellie.

'There was music, of course,' said Miss Larkin hurriedly. 'Mary Catherine could play very nicely and so she sat down at the piano——'

'Oh, 'S'ar, do make it a harp,' I interrupted, it being my own childish ambition to perform on that instrument.

'Well then, the harp,' conceded our governess. 'Mary Catherine was only beginning to learn the harp, and so she only played a little piece, but everyone said she had great taste and would soon learn to play very nicely.'

This sounded rather tame, and we were relieved when Aggie inquired: 'Didn't they play games at the party?'

'Oh yes, they played games,' said Miss Larkin, starting off with a fresh inspiration. 'Not rough, noisy games, of course, because they all had their

best clothes on; but nice quiet games like "Forfeits" and "Hunt the Slipper."'

'I suppose Mary Catherine took off her slipper,' said Nellie with a reflective smile.

Then Gertie chimed in: 'What sort of slipper did Mary Catherine wear? Oh, 'S 'ar, did she have pink satin slippers?'

Miss Larkin was rather shocked.

'No, Gertie, that wouldn't have been at all suitable,' she said. 'Mary Catherine wore sensible shoes—leather strap shoes,' she added firmly.

'But perhaps they were pink leather,' suggested Gertie. 'There is red leather—you know. A lump of red leather—a led reather—I mean a red reather —bother! Anyhow there *is* red leather, so perhaps there might be pink leather.'

'No,' said Miss Larkin; 'Mary Catherine's parents were very sensible people, and they wouldn't have allowed her to wear anything unsuitable. Mary Catherine's shoes were black, serviceable black patent leather.'

This was a blow, and we offered no more suggestions for a while. Miss Larkin, being left to her own devices, floundered somewhat, and our interest flagged, but presently revived when it transpired that Mary Catherine had a little brother called Tommy.

'He was rather a naughty boy,' she announced ponderously. We were immediately thrilled, and

hastened to ask: 'What did he do?' in awe-struck tones.

'Well, he fell into a pond one day,' resumed Miss Larkin; 'a green, slimy pond.'

'Oh, did he fall right in, 'S 'ar?'

'Yes, right in. He was particularly desired not to go near that pond,' continued Miss Larkin, laboriously elaborating details. 'But he would go. He was—he was trying to catch a frog,' with a sudden burst of inspiration, 'and his foot slipped, and he fell right in.'

'He must have swallowed some of the nasty green slimy water,' said Nellie, who had a vivid imagination and who rather revelled in harrowing details.

'He did,' agreed Miss Larkin. 'His father came and pulled him out, and his nice clothes were all spoilt.'

'What sort of clothes did Tommy wear?' asked Gertie.

'He had a plaid tunic,' said Miss Larkin, 'and knickerbockers.' (Knickerbockers were just then coming into fashion for little boys.)

'What sort of knickerbockers?' inquired Gertie. 'Plaid knickerbockers?'

Miss Larkin endeavoured to conjure up the vision of her hero thus attired, but finally dismissed the idea.

'He wore flannel knickerbockers,' she said briskly. 'Red flannel knickerbockers.'

We felt dubious over the material, I remember, but the colour pleased our fancy.

Mary Catherine and Tommy meandered through several adventures on successive afternoons, Mary Catherine being invariably so serious and good that we instinctively felt she was held up to us for an example. But Tommy used to steal sugar, and climb up forbidden trees, and break windows, all of which lapses were suitably punished. Miss Larkin was not fond of Tommy. She much preferred his elder brother Harold, who was of a serious turn of mind, and was studying to be a clerk.

Whether it was because we got tired of hearing about Mary Catherine or because Miss Larkin's inventive faculty deserted her I cannot now remember. But all at once we began to make up stories on our own account.

Such stories as they were, too! Gertie was of a romantic turn of mind, and the tales which she invented were very sentimental. The heroines were generally married at the age of twelve—'they did in those days, you know.' She would have liked to make this event take place at an even earlier age—one nearer her own, in fact—but Miss Larkin, being consulted, gave it as her opinion that such a thing would be quite impossible.

Forlorn brides of twelve, therefore, bade sad farewells to gallant lords of fourteen or thereabouts, who, immediately after the marriage ceremony,

were obliged to march away on some perilous enterprise.

The adventures varied, of course, but the beginnings and ends were generally the same. The heroes always came back covered with glory to be happy for evermore with their long-lost brides. On one occasion a startling novelty was introduced by the lady's producing a blue velvet case in which she had carefully preserved all the tears which she had wept for her spouse during his absence. On the casket being opened, the pearly drops rolled out one by one, to the exceeding emotion of the hero.

We loved long and high-sounding words, of which we seldom understood the meaning, and which we frequently mispronounced. It was a favourite practice of Gertie's, for instance, to make her persecuted heroines—they generally were persecuted, by the way, during the absence of their rightful protectors—respond to some undeserved attack with 'venoment s'casm.' To this day she maintains that the phrase is infinitely more expressive than that presumably intended — 'vehement sarcasm.'

Even the little ones told stories sometimes, but only to each other. We elders were obliged to creep round doors and hide behind window curtains in order to catch a chance word or two. I remember a romance of Nellie's about a house 'with marble curtains,' which was on one occasion 'put into a

carriage'; also a discussion between her and Aggie as to whether the heroine should wear a hat or a bonnet.

'Mamma wears a bonnet,' said Aggie conclusively.

Then a bonnet it must be; but should it be made of gold or silver, Nellie wanted to know.

'Mamma's bonnets are never made of gold or silver,' answered the critic; but Nellie, who had ideas of oriental magnificence, carried the day, and ultimately the bonnet was composed of 'gold straw' and trimmed with 'diamond lace.'

CHAPTER III

CLEAN SOCKS

It is quite impossible for many grown-up people to realise the intense weariness which the process of dressing and undressing produces in children, and the insane hatred with which they regard certain toilet ceremonials.

A small cousin of mine once asked his mother tearfully *why* he couldn't go out 'just in his hat and his boots,' while other little folks, on the contrary, regard those objects with peculiar abhorrence.

I remember going to the nursery once when my two-year-old son was being dressed to go out, to find a harassed nurse struggling with the last button of his gaiters.

'Isn't that child ready yet?'

'Well, ma'am, I've got his legs done, and that's the worst!' groaned the poor woman.

I can distinctly recollect my aversion for gaiters and boots, and the gloves which I was obliged to wear, summer and winter, for my mother was very particular about the condition of our hands. The woolly gloves which we wore in winter when very

small had no fingers, and, as we were in danger of losing them, they were fastened tightly round our wrists with elastic; but even the discomfort of that was better than the horrible sensation of having, as frequently happened, two of our own fingers thrust into one of the cotton fingers of the gloves which we wore in summer, these gloves being subsequently tightly buttoned. Shuzzey was fussy, and the nursery-maid impatient, I, 'Miss Mollie,' was always supposed to be fidgeting about something; in consequence my legitimate complaints were disregarded, and my daily walk was frequently a penitential exercise.

But much as I hated gloves, fingerless or otherwise, it was nothing to my detestation of socks.

We were dressed entirely in white for the first seven years of our lives, and our frocks, pinafores, and 'spencers' were changed twice a day.

Do you know what a 'spencer' was? It was a muslin jacket which we wore under the short-sleeved, low-necked frocks which we donned clean for our two o'clock dinner and 'finished out' on the following morning. In the evenings, before going down to dessert, we discarded our spencers and changed into embroidered dresses, the short sleeves of which were provided with little tapes for tying up the straps and sleeves of our undergarments. The frocks were usually highly starched and the tapes too, so that we often squirmed and wriggled like Maggie Tulliver. But worse than

the starched frocks and worse than the scratchy tie-ups, worse even than the hot, coarse finger of the nursery-maid poking under our garments in sensitive places, was the—to my mind—useless operation of changing socks. They had, perhaps, just begun to feel comfortable, having slipped into easy creases, and one always wanted so very much to finish putting a doll to bed, or to clean a paint-box, when one was told to sit on the floor and change them. Night after night the same battle ensued between me and Shuzzey.

'Miss Mollie, sit down this minute and change your socks.'

'Oh, Shuzzey, they are quite clean!'

'Do what I tell you, miss!'

'I don't wa-ant to!'

'If you don't do what you're desired, Miss Mollie, I'll have to take you down to your mamma. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself—wanting to be a dirty little girl when there's company.'

'I *don't* want to be a dirty girl. You're very unkind, Shuzzey.'

'Mollie, for shame,' Gertie would say reprovingly, standing with a virtuous air to have her pretty hair smeared with pomatum.

Yes; that is what happened to us when we were little girls! A dollop of Marrow Oil, yellow and luscious and strongly-scented, was taken out of a glass jar, rolled round and round on the palms of the nurse's hands, and smeared on our

poor little locks. These locks were subsequently brushed, curled, and held in place with a strip of white elastic.

'Shuzzey is very unkind,' I would repeat in a dismal wail. And sometimes I would add: 'I wish Shuzzey was out of the house!'

This was considered the greatest iniquity of which a child was capable, and used frequently to be followed by one of those penitential pilgrimages 'downstairs to your mamma,' subsequently described.

But on the point of clean socks I was apparently incorrigible in spite of all remonstrances, and even bribes, for I was really a special favourite with Shuzzey.

One evening, to my great surprise, just as I was twisting up my face and wriggling my shoulders with the usual formula: '*Why* must I change my socks?' Shuzzey replied briskly: 'Very well, then, Miss Mollie, you needn't change them if you don't like; but, if I were you, I should be ashamed to be seen going downstairs in dirty finery.'

I positively gasped. I looked hard at Shuzzey, who looked back at me, mildly and calmly; then I glanced down at my socks which seemed to be quite clean enough. I said so and Shuzzey argued no more.

I put on the little cream-coloured strap shoes, of the same pattern as those which we always wore,

indeed, but new and smart, and stood quite still to be dressed in the evening frock almost entirely covered with hand-made embroidery, which was worn on great occasions. I did not even squirm when my dark hair was sleeked back, and the ends twisted round Shuzzey's finger. Then, quite pleased with myself, I took my place in the procession which went downstairs for dessert.

Gertie and I, hand in hand, marched at the head, then came Shuzzey leading Nellie, while the nursery-maid, carrying Aggie, brought up the rear. For the midday meal Baby also made his appearance, in the arms of his nurse, and during the ensuing repast each attendant used to stand beside her special charge to cut up its dinner and feed it. Baby, who was an absent-minded little boy, and was also subject to lazy fits, would not take the trouble to turn his head sometimes. The nurse used to prick his cheek gently with the fork to remind him that the next morsel was ready, whereupon he would content himself with twisting his lips in the direction of the hovering fork, still without turning his head.

But at dessert-time the nurses did not come into the room; the big heavy mahogany dining-room door was thrown wide open, and we marched in, the little ones being set upon their legs for the purpose.

On this particular evening my mother was not using the dining-room proper, which was in

process of being papered. She and her friends sat at a small round table in a bay-windowed room opening out of the library. We had to walk the whole length of the latter imposing chamber, which held for us associations that were awesome as well as delightful; the books lived there to be sure, but it was here that lectures were delivered and fines imposed.

The folding doors which communicated with the further room were thrown open, the babies set down, and in we came, I nothing suspecting, in fact rather jubilant than otherwise, for there were peaches for dessert.

But what was this? Everyone in the room was looking at me, and in particular at my unfortunate legs.

My mother, bending forward from behind the wax candles, summoned me to her side.

'What do I see?' she asked. 'Is it possible that you have not changed your socks?'

'I never heard of such a thing as a little girl not changing her socks to come down to dessert,' said a very fat lady from the other side of the round table.

I disliked and feared this occasional visitor because she was so fat, and because her double chin waggled when she spoke; it was waggling now. Miss Larkin looked shocked and surprised, but was apparently too much pained to speak, while our dear old friend and priest, Doctor Taylor, who was

usually foremost in jokes with us, sipped his port without a word.

'When I was a little girl,' continued Miss Z., who was apparently determined to improve the occasion, 'I should have been ashamed to show myself in dirty finery.'

'Dirty finery'—it was Shuzzey's very phrase. Though I detested Miss Z., and distinctly resented being corrected by a visitor, I was conscience-stricken; and when my mother presently said that she did not know if she could allow a little girl in dirty finery to sit at her table, I did not wait to hear the result of Doctor Taylor's persuasions. Though I felt quite sure that he was prepared to 'beg me off,' I turned and fled, loudly lamenting, through the folding-doors and across the long, long library to the slippery hall, where, strangely enough, Shuzzey happened to be lingering.

'I told you so,' said Shuzzey severely.

I was too much crushed to resent this turning the dagger in the wound, but went upstairs, sobbing all the way, and glad to reach the safe haven of the nursery. Mobie was there, and I flung myself into her kind, soft embrace.

Mobie was distinctly cross, not with me, as I speedily discovered, but with 'somebody else,' as she darkly put it, 'who might have found something better to do nor—well, never mind! The poor child! Whisht alannah, wait now, sure I have a clean pair of socks here that we'll pop on

in a minute. You can run down again and nobody'll take any notice of you. There's peaches and grapes an' all sorts.'

Not for all the peaches and grapes in the world would I have again faced those disapproving eyes or have endured Miss Z.'s fat laugh, or seen her chin waggle. I sat by the nursery guard instead, and Mobie made me a piece of 'French toast,' and sprinkled sugar on top.

But I could not soon forget the ignominy of that night; and the quickness with which my mother and all her guests had simultaneously detected my lapse was a puzzle which remained unsolved. It was long afterwards that I realised that the affair had been arranged between Shuzzey and my mother, without the consent or perhaps the knowledge of Mobie, who would have certainly given me some hint.

But the lesson, if drastic, was effective. Thenceforth I changed my socks without a murmur.

I got into one or two other 'bad scrapes,' to quote a phrase familiar to us at about this time. Once, I believe, though I do not now remember it, I turned on all the water-taps in the house and garden. My mother, having discovered a stream flowing down the gravel path, and duly reprimanded the gardener, to whose carelessness she thought the accident due, came indoors only to find a rivulet leaping down the back stairs, while the nursery corridor was flooded. I was then

so small that no one thought of my being answerable for this state of things, until I was detected at the extreme end of a visitors' corridor struggling with a tap. I don't know what punishment fell to my lot. It cannot have been very severe or I should remember it.

Probably I was sent to bed. This was a safe form of chastisement frequently undergone by us until Nellie put an end to it. Instead of being sent to bed for an hour, and then no more being said, she was unfortunately told by Shuzzey that she would stay in bed 'until she was good.' Nellie was then about four, a little fat pink-and-white thing with long straight yellow hair and enormous blue eyes. These eyes she now fixed vengefully on Shuzzey, screwing up her mouth the while.

When Shuzzey thought the punishment had lasted long enough she came up to her cot.

'Are you good now, Miss Nellie?'

'No;' said Nellie firmly.

Our nursery luncheon-time came, and we ate our bread and butter, and drank our milk, according to our custom, in the passage, peeping in at Nellie every now and then through the open door—she was very fond of milk. Shuzzey returned to the charge.

'Come now, Miss Nellie, say you're good and you shall get up and have your luncheon.'

'No;' said Nellie.

We went out again with our hoops and our gardening tools. Nellie remained in bed, her big blue eyes following Shuzzey solemnly as she moved about the room. When we came in to get ready for our two o'clock dinner, Nellie was still in bed, but Shuzzey had gone to fetch our mother. Presently both came in, my mother looking solemn, Shuzzey slightly flustered.

After saying, as usual, that she was *surprised* to hear that Nellie had been disobedient, and hoped she would never be naughty again, my mother went on: 'But now, if you'll promise to be good you may get up and come down to your dinner.'

Dead silence on Nellie's part. The blue eyes wandered from my mother's face to Shuzzey's and back again.

'You're going to be good *now*, Nellie, aren't you?' pursued my mother almost persuasively.

'No;' said Nellie.

'Then I'm afraid you can't have any dinner,' returned my mother, relapsing into severity.

In bed the child remained the whole of that day and not another word did she say, contenting herself with shaking her head in reply to each inquiry. Mobie came in and tried coaxing.

'Come now, my *lambeen bawn* [little fair lamb], sure you're good now, as good as gold—I can see that for myself. Amn't I going to make windows on your bread and butter for you, and maybe'

(sinking her voice) ' just a sprinkle of brown sugar. You'll say you're good, and make an end of this.'

But Nellie would not say she was good, though she loved Mobie, and the prospect of bread and butter with ' windows ' on it, and a sprinkling of brown sugar was alluring, and though it was hard to withstand Mobie when she winked with both eyes together. She looked stonily back in the intervals of shaking her head.

My mother began to get really anxious. She paid one or two visits to Nellie's cot with the same result.

Mobie was disposed to quarrel with Shuzzey, and was heard to inquire if she meant to starve that child ' out-and-out.' When we went to bed we were informed by a nursery-maid in an awe-struck whisper that Miss Nellie had fallen asleep still unrepentant and unfed; but a rumour subsequently leaked out that, while we we were all slumbering, Mobie had gently roused her and insisted on her disposing of a bowl of bread and milk. On the following morning she was taken up as if nothing had happened. No further tests were applied and the incident was never again alluded to.

But somehow or other being sent to bed as a punishment ceased to be in vogue in our nursery.

Our breakfast every morning consisted alternately of bread and milk or ' stirabout.' Our bread and milk was served in four blue and white bowls, one of which was a special favourite. It had not a

mottled-all-over pattern like the others, but was of rather fine white china with a blue rim; it had little blue handles, and, moreover, a lid with a blue knob on top. We quarrelled so much over this bowl that it was finally decided we should eat out of it in turn. One day—it must have been holiday time, I think, for we were breakfasting downstairs in the big dining-room with my mother—Gertie took possession of this bowl. I promptly reminded her that it was my turn, but elbowing me on one side, she removed the lid and seized a spoon.

'It *is* my turn,' insisted I. 'You had it yesterday.'

'Well, I'm going to have it to-day,' said Gertie, 'and I have begun now.'

And she popped in her spoon.

'It isn't fair,' I wailed. 'You *know* it's my turn.'

'Children, what *are* you quarrelling about?' asked my mother.

'We have it turn about,' I explained. 'Shuzzey *always* lets us have the blue bowl turn about.'

'And Gertie had it yesterday,' put in Nellie, hastening to my aid.

'That isn't being honourable, Gertie,' said my mother. 'You shouldn't break a rule just because you are having your breakfast downstairs. Give Mollie the bowl at once.'

Gertie pushed the bowl, spoon and all, across to me, and sulkily accepted the common mottled

object which I extended to her. There may have been something of triumph in my gaze, and in any case my mother's reproof rankled.

Presently she burst out: 'Mollie needn't talk. Who walked on the chimney-piece yesterday?'

'*What!*' exclaimed my mother, setting down her teapot. Then, after a pause: 'What chimney-piece?'

'That one!' cried Gertie, pointing to the mantel-piece behind her.

At this time there were painters in the house and we 'did our lessons' in the dining-room. The schoolroom piano had been placed on the right of the dining-room fireplace, and on the previous day I had, indeed, climbed first on the music-stool, then on the piano, and, finally, on to the broad shelf of the chimney-piece. It was made of polished black slate, and I remember, during those moments of impish triumph, I skated up and down its glassy surface, finally enthroning myself on the clock in the middle. This further iniquity Gertie, still smarting under the deprivation of the blue bowl and the reflection on her honour, now hastened to reveal.

'She sat on the clock,' said Gertie.

My mother turned quite pale. The chimney-piece was at least six feet from the ground, and, though it was a broad one, the squat solid mahogany clock filled up so much space that there was only a margin of about five inches in front

of it. It turned her sick, no doubt, to think how easily my foot might have slipped, or the clock toppled over with me into the steel fender below.

'She might have broken her neck,' she said in a trembling voice. 'Is this true, Mary?'—my mother was always deeply displeased when she called me 'Mary.'

Gertie's a nasty tell-tale,' I exclaimed inconsequently.

'Indeed, I'm very glad she told,' said my mother; and I must own it was hard to see Gertie assume a virtuous air, and even the little ones turn scandalised eyes upon me.

'I didn't know it was any harm,' I protested, much injured. 'You never told me not to.'

'How could I ever think of telling you not to walk on that chimney-piece?' cried my mother, with increasing anger. 'Who could ever have dreamt of your doing such a thing?'

As a matter of fact it was Gertie who had tempted me to perform the feat in question, while the others had laughed and applauded. It did seem hard that I should have to bear all the scolding, perhaps worse than scolding.

'You really deserve a whipping,' said my mother.

If she could have brought herself to do it, I believe I should have been whipped there and then. But those little white hands of hers were never raised against us. It was almost worse, however,

to be told that I had taken advantage of Miss Larkin's absence, and had proved myself not fit to be trusted, and that in future good care should be taken that I should not be left alone. The tale of my misdemeanour was circulated far and wide, with a view, no doubt, of impressing its heinousness on my mind, my mother having been genuinely startled by my plea that the escapade had not been forbidden. I used to quake at a certain expression which came over her dear face when our friends and neighbours chanced to notice me. Even the doctor was told, and Mrs. Brady at the general shop in our market town.

'Miss Mary has grown,' said Mrs. Brady. Then my mother looked at me.

'It is a pity that Miss Mary has so little sense,' she said. 'Do you know what she did lately, Mrs. Brady?'

Then Miss Mary hung her head and grew redder and redder, while Mrs. Brady listened with an expression of shocked amazement (which was the attitude my mother evidently desired her to assume), combined with a lurking sense of amusement.

'Well, well, to think of that! What won't young ladies be up to? Indeed I'm sure it must have frightened the life out of you, ma'am. But I'm sure Miss Mary will never do it again.'

'And to think of her saying I had never forbidden her to do it,' my mother would continue.

'How could anyone imagine that a child could do such a thing! And there's no knowing what fancy she may take into her head next, that I haven't forbidden.'

Oh, the ignominy of listening to Mrs. Brady's faint excuses and unconvinced assurances that I would behave better for the future! I could see her subsequently informing Mr. Brady, whose fat shoulders rolled in a way which much offended me, and who was disposed to be quizzical when I subsequently expended a penny on a yard of ribbon for my dolly's sash.

Gertie did not always keep up her attitude of the virtuous and pattern elder sister—she was sometimes a very imp of mischief.

One day she came up behind me as I was washing my hands in our bedroom.

'Mollie, quick! Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and see what God will send you!'

I quickly jerked my hands out of the basin and clasped them behind me, according to nursery etiquette on such occasions. I obediently shut my eyes and opened my mouth, and whisked round, all pleasant anticipation of the 'something nice' which the formula used by Gertie generally heralded. But no dainty was placed upon my tongue. Only Gertie's fat little finger which she had previously dipped into the contents of a small oil lamp which chanced to be in the room.

Oh, what a fuss I made, and how Gertie laughed

and capered until Shuzzey came hurrying in! I declared I was going to be sick and did my best to make myself so—without success, luckily. Then, after Gertie had been well scolded, and even threatened with the birch rod if such a thing ever happened again, I felt better, and followed Shuzzey into the big nursery and up to the door of her own special cupboard, from the upper shelf of which she produced a special store of sugar-plums reserved for great occasions. They were little sugar slippers, pink and green. When you bit off the toe a sweet and luscious fluid oozed into your mouth; you sucked this out to the last drop and then chewed up the covering, which made a delightfully scrunching noise. I had one of these now, a pink one, and while Gertie looked enviously on, I ate it slowly and luxuriously. Then I proposed to Gertie to 'make up.'

'I'm not angry,' I said, with what I felt to be pathetic dignity. 'I'm only hurt.'

But to my surprise Gertie was dignified too. Instead of rushing to hug me she stood looking at me with her nostrils puffed out, which, with her, betokened the exercise of severe self-control.

'I'm not angry, either,' she said; 'but I think it would have been nicer if you had asked to make up *before* you had finished the slipper.'

After all it was I who felt conscience-stricken when we embraced.

But Gertie was to fall into even deeper disgrace before long.

Two cupboards stood side by side in the principal nursery, and we were strictly desired never to climb into these as we often wanted to do when playing hide-and-seek. The right-hand wardrobe, which contained Shuzzey's dresses, was rather rickety, and we had been warned more than once not to attempt to open it, or even to run against it.

What, therefore, was Shuzzey's horror after a vain search for Gertie one day, to find this particular wardrobe *rocking!* The combined efforts of herself and the nursery-maid steadied it, while Mobie, opening the door, revealed Miss Gertie, who, having ensconced herself within, had nearly brought the whole structure over by trying to sit down.

No mercy was shown on that occasion. The rod was actually brought out from behind the looking-glass and applied to the young lady's little person with a great show of severity.

We all stood round awe-struck, and neither Gertie nor any of the rest of us ever forgot that awful ceremonial. Shuzzey's cupboard was thenceforth left severely alone.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN MY MAMMA WAS A LITTLE GIRL

I WONDER if any child nowadays ever reads about Rosamund. I don't mean the Fair Rosamund whose tragedy—connected with the Cup of Poison (there is something particularly horrible in the idea of poison being administered in a cup) and a Dagger, and Wicked Queen Eleanor—sent cold shivers down my youthful spine; but Miss Edgeworth's Rosamund, Rosamund of the Purple Jar, and the Filigree Basket, and the Day of Misfortunes—does any modern child care to read about her?

I, myself, perused her history with keen interest, in those far-away days when my insatiable passion for reading was supposed to be checked by being limited to one book a week, which, to be sure, I was allowed to read as often as I liked, but which could not be replaced until the appointed day came round. It was, perhaps, because I learned to appreciate the qualities of Miss Edgeworth's sedate little heroine, and to follow the course of her well-ordered days that I, in common with my sisters, took a special delight in our old

nurse's anecdotes of what our mamma did when she was a little girl; for our mamma's childhood belonged to days in which Rosamund herself might have lived. In the early thirties of last century little girls still wore nightcaps, and called their parents 'Sir' and 'Ma'am,' and dined with them at five or six o'clock—in my mother's case invariably by candlelight, for it was my grandfather's special idiosyncrasy to sit down to that meal with shutters closed and curtains drawn—and to go to bed before the appearance of the supper of which the elders subsequently partook. My grandfather fortified himself meanwhile by the consumption of an entire bottle of claret, while he read his newspaper diligently from cover to cover, holding it carefully behind the pair of candles which were the only lights in the room. My mother used often to tell me of how, sitting in semi-darkness during the summer evenings, she used to think regretfully of the mellow sunlight outside, and the birds singing, and the long shadows creeping across the roses and pinks in her own special garden. But children of those days did not murmur, and the mistress of the house, a gentle creature, never dreamed of interfering with the arrangements of the autocrat.

It was Mobie who used to tell us about the earliest days of all, when our mamma was still in the nursery and under her special care. Mobie had originally been maid to our grandmother, whom

she used to describe as a 'very nice young lady,' and whom she used frequently to hold up as an example to the third generation. Our grandmother, it appeared, never threw her clothes on the floor and took flying leaps into bed, after the degenerate fashion of our day, but folded each garment separately, placing the neat heap upon a chair at the foot of the bed, so that she might dress with the least possible delay in the morning. Perhaps, like Rosamund, she made that bed; she certainly wore a nightcap, for our own mother did, continuing the custom to the last day of her life.

Mobie, whose proper title was Mrs. O'Brien, though her name had been thus condensed and softened by our childish lips—followed our grandmother to her married home and subsequently became nurse to her only child. She was not our nurse at all, though she queened it in our nursery. In reality she was supposed to be housekeeper, and was frequently to be met panting up and down the back stairs with a bunch of jingling keys in her hand, or officiating in a certain semi-shuttered room surrounded by tall presses, which, on being opened, smelt like a chandler's shop.

But her real sanctum was the linen-room, a bright sunny little chamber also surrounded by presses, but cheerful-looking ones, these, of cream-coloured wood, with glazed pink calico linings to the grated doors. When these doors were opened nice scents greeted our nostrils, of clean linen and

lavender; and at the further end was a cupboard containing all manner of delicious dainties which smelt as good as they looked. French plums, figs, almonds and raisins, choice biscuits, cinnamon and vanilla. The youngster was in luck who chanced to find that particular door open when she strolled into the linen-room, for Mobie was soft-hearted, and could never refuse a plea for 'just one!' Many a scolding did she subsequently endure on account of these depredations, for sometimes the stores came short at inconvenient times, and, as we lived at a considerable distance from any town, could not be replaced without difficulty.

It was on Saturday mornings that our chief colloquies with Mobie took place, for on Saturday mornings it was her custom to 'attend to our toe-nails. We used to troop in, all four of us, to undergo this ceremonial, which was enlivened for us throughout by the dear old body's discourse.

I can see Mobie seated in the sunny window before the big square wooden table, usually covered with pieces of linen in need of mending, but on this day of the week strewn with the white starched tuckers which we children then wore, and which Mobie crimped with a blunt table-knife. This knife would be carefully put out of reach on our appearance, the frills pushed on one side, and with a 'Now, alannah,' we were seated in order of seniority on the table, shoes and socks pulled off,

and our impatience beguiled by the reminiscences aforesaid.

Sometimes an adroit question elicited them.

'Wasn't grandfather rather cross to mamma, Mobie? She says if she was a minute late when she came back from riding, she would find him standing on the steps with his watch in his hand.'

'That was only because he was always afraid of his life something might have happened to her, alannah. He was wrapped up in your mamma. I remember once—it was before she could speak, that time—I had put her in her little cot and I thought she was asleep, and went downstairs to fetch something—and if her ladyship didn't get up and walk downstairs all by herself, and into the parlour where there was a big dinner party going on! If she didn't walk in after the footman that was carrying a dish, tripping in her long night-dress, and sitting down on the floor. The master was near killing me that time: she was only about fifteen months old, and he hardly thought she could walk at all. Though there was company there, and dinner not half over, if he didn't send the footman flying off to fetch a doctor the way he'd make sure there were no bones broke. Aye, she was very independent: another time she found my bonnet and shawl on a chair—I'd just come in and thrown them off—and she put them on and would have marched off with herself only she was too polite to go without saying good-bye to me first.

She couldn't speak plain, but she made out to tell me she was goin', so you may think I had her by the skirts just as she was turning round after makin' her little curtsey.'

'And would she have gone out, do you think?'

'She might, if she got the chance, and if she had, I think the master would have sent me packin', out-and-out. Now, put on your socks, Miss Gertie dear, and don't be runnin' on the floor in your bare feet. Now, Miss Mollie, it's your turn.'

In the intervals of squirming, for I was very ticklish, I elicited the next anecdote on Mobie's list.

'Tell us about mamma when she went driving in the wheelbarrow.'

'Indeed, I used to be sick and tired of that game, but it was a notion she took one time to pretend she was going on a round of calls like her mamma. "I think," she'd say in her old-fashioned way, "I'll pay a few visits this morning, Bess." (She never would call me Nanny or Nurse, the way most children do. Her mamma called me Bess, so she called me Bess.)

'Well, she'd stand as grave as a judge for me to dress her in her little coat. That was the beautifullest coat you ever saw, Miss Mollie. The master himself chose the cloth. Your grandmamma was a very delicate lady, and nervous with horses, and she'd never go out driving if she could help it, so she asked the master to be so good as to do

the commission for her. Well, when the cloth came home, your grandmamma was quite vexed. It was the best that money could buy, a sort of cream colour, soft and glossy; but that thick, it would have stood alone.

"Why, Powell," says your grandmamma, "the child will never be able to wear that out; she'll outgrow it in no time, and then it will go to waste.

"Never mind," says he, "if it serves her turn while she can wear it, you've nothing to complain of."

'Well, I'd put on the coat, and I'd tie on her little bonnet—it was a little drawn-silk bonnet, very pretty, and she'd hold out her hands for me to put on her gloves; and then she'd say: "Don't forget the cards, Bess."

'"No, ma'am," I'd say, and she'd stand and watch me while I'd cut up a bit of notepaper into little pieces to look like cards. Then out we'd go, and she'd stop by the garden gate and say: "I'll wait here for the carriage"—and I'd have to go off with myself down to the tool-shed to fetch the wheelbarrow. The gardener 'd put a bundle of straw in for me, and I'd spread a shawl over that, and my lady would sit in it as grand as the bellows.

'I declare my back used to ache trundling her round the garden, first to the moss-rose bush, and then to the lilacs, and back again to the syringa—I think we visited every bush and flower in the

place. I had to put the wheelbarrow down on its legs and leave off being coachman, and be footman for a change. She'd leave a message for this one, and maybe a nosegay for that one, along with a card; and she'd always sit quite solemn and ask what the servant said, or if there was any message, when I came back to the barrow.

'None of the ladies she visited was ever at home, because she did not want to go climbing in and out of the wheelbarrow.

'Well, one day I remember, it was getting rather late, and I thought it looked like rain, and was anxious to get her in, so when we came to the last bush, and she was fumbling in her little pocket for the card, I said to her quick-like: "Come now, make haste—let's throw it in." I'll never forget the look she gave me; she held back the card a minute before she let me take it. "*Hand* it, if you please," says she.'

At this point Mobie would straighten herself and look round for the applause which was sure to follow. This trait was so exactly in accordance with the character of our dear mother as we knew her, that we never tired of hearing it recited. The little blue-eyed child, sitting erect in her wheel barrow and gravely stipulating for the exact accomplishment of the proper form, was easily recognisable in the mamma, whose pretty ways were still so delicately neat, precise, and orderly. The little hand that held back the card was the same

hand we loved to watch. Sometimes it would be writing, ever clearly and distinctly, without hurry or confusion, each well-formed letter fulfilling its purpose of helping to express an equally well-defined thought; and sometimes it would be working, though not very often, for my mother was not fond of her needle. But to us children the little leather work-box, with its pointed scissors, and small—very small—silver thimble, its ivory bobbins, its skeins of silk, was a thing of mystery and delight; and we watched, with never-failing fascination, the delicate fingers that held the needle, and formed such infinitesimally small stitches. The mending of a baby's cap, or the concoction of quaint pocket-cases made of scraps of coloured satin, and stiffened with cardboard, were her chief accomplishments. We could well imagine the look in the grave blue eyes of the little mamma in the wheelbarrow, the poise of the little hand which held the card, the tone in which the rebuke was administered, just the look and tone in which mamma to-day would declare she was *surprised* at our delinquencies—the occasional reprimand which we were marshalled before her to receive invariably took that form, and the small culprit to whom it was administered never failed to feel overwhelmed with the sense of guilt; but it was humorous and delightful to think of a child of three or four imposing on a grown-up and rather important person like Mobie, in precisely the same manner.

'Your mamma was just the same then as she is now,' Mobie would sometimes continue. 'You know how careful she is to keep her things put away and never to leave her keys about. I remember once seeing her get out of her cot when we were both in bed, and gravely locking up a penny which she had left on the dressing-table. I could see her creeping across the room by the light of the fire. "What are you doing that for, alannah?" said I. "It's very wrong to leave temptation in the way of servants," says your mamma.'

But these anecdotes belonged, of course, to our mother's nursery days; it was even more interesting to hear from her own lips certain episodes of her life at school. We knew, of course, all about her own home, with its pleasant green fields, and her white Shetland pony, Fan, which was so small that it was occasionally allowed to come into the house, and to be led round the dining-room table; of how, escaping from the vigilant Bess, our mother would go for scampers on the back of this little creature, escorted only by her dog. Of how the pony would become so frisky as to entangle itself in its capers in the folds of my mother's long habit, and the two would roll over together and get up none the worse. We knew all about the little dog, Quiz, which would sit beneath the gooseberry bushes, daintily picking off the ripe fruit; and Dicky, the canary, which was never caged, and

used to hop about the table during meals, occasionally being handed round with the potatoes. But it was even more thrilling to hear of how, after many heart-searchings, the adoring parents made up their minds to send the only child to school, of her adventures on the way, and of the pranks which she played there.

Instead of getting into a dull railway train, our little mamma, with her father and mother, set forth in their own carriage, in which they sat in great state in the packet-boat which conveyed them across the Irish Channel.

In this carriage—a 'chariot,' roomy enough to contain six, lined throughout with putty-coloured cloth, with a rumble behind in which the maid and man sat side by side, and an 'imperial' and all sorts of oddly-shaped boxes fitting into their respective places—they posted in leisurely fashion across England, halting at many interesting places on the way, before terminating their journey at the old-world convent school in Essex, where they were to leave the little girl.

The parents must have been sad at heart when, after two days' visit, and the delivery of many farewell injunctions, they drove away again. But our little mamma soon dried her tears and entered into the life of the place.

It was a very comfortable home-like life after all. There was no great clanging bell to startle the sleeping children from their beds at early dawn,

no frenzied struggle to accomplish a perfunctory toilet while one's eyes were still held by sleep, and one's limbs stiff with cold. A kindly sister made her way from one to the other of the comfortable bedrooms, calling each girl by name: 'Miss Powell! Miss Walmesley! Miss Weld!'

And Miss Powell, Miss Walmesley, and Miss Weld would get up with comfortable deliberation, well aware that three-quarters of an hour must elapse before they need present themselves in the chapel.

We were interested to hear of the lessons my mother did, and the friendships which she made, one in particular which lasted while life endured; but we were, above all, delighted to hear of the talent for mischief which she soon developed when thrown among companions of her own age.

She had always been bright and often witty, as was proved by some of the sayings handed down to us by those who knew her in her childhood, but until her school days there is only one instance on record of that spice of innocent malice which was presently to develop. The apparently sedate little girl was then under the tuition of a very prim and proper governess, whose axioms (of the 'prunes and prisms' order) she was sedulously desired to lay to heart. On one occasion when at dinner with her parents and this estimable lady, someone called attention to the slightly rumpled condition of the child's hair, which was cropped short, and which

usually lay smoothly round her little head; and as parents in those days never lost an opportunity of pointing a moral, she was advised to cultivate neatness.

'Ah, yes;' said our mamma, looking up with a sigh, but with a twinkle in her eye. 'It isn't everyone who is as neat as Miss Doherty. *She* takes off her hair every night—and puts it away in a drawer.'

It was in something of the same mood that she and her schoolmates received a new companion, the announcement of whose arrival had been made in due form by the head mistress.

'You may expect a new companion this afternoon, young ladies. I hope you will find her agreeable, and I am sure you will endeavour to be kind and obliging. Her name is Miss O'Flaherty.'

One of the girls—not my mother, I think—respectfully asked for a repetition of the name.

'Miss O'Flaherty,' was the reply, delivered in slightly raised tones.

When the newcomer was ushered into the playroom she was slightly disconcerted at being greeted by a laughing chorus: 'How do you do, Miss O'Fla-ha-ha-ha-ha-erty!'

There was a secret hiding-place entered by a hole in a hayloft, which was the scene of many stolen meetings of the leading spirits of that school. It proved a harbour of refuge after hairbreadth escapes

from the vigilance of the authorities, and a safe council chamber where mischievous schemes could be hatched at ease. They numbered seven, these dashing spirits, my mother being one of the ring-leaders, though evidently she sometimes felt certain pangs of conscience, for we once saw a queer little missive in her possession, written by a companion who was untroubled by any scruples: 'Of course I know it is forbidden to write notes. Don't write notes, write envelopes as I do.'

The delicate flowing writing, so like my mother's own, did indeed cover the inner side of an old-fashioned envelope.

It was my mother, however, who stole the jam tarts in company with her special friend, dear Ellen, whom we afterwards knew and loved. The régime of the school, though plentiful and wholesome, was of an extremely simple order—roast meat and a plain pudding appearing regularly at the principal meal. That pudding was the source of much dissatisfaction among the young people, for it was nearly always composed of rice. One of the Seven, who chanced to be a poet, delivered her companions from a state of things which was at length felt to be unendurable. When the Refectory Sister came to remove the dish one day, at the allotted time, she found its contents untouched; everyone's plate was empty, everyone was looking sadly at the tablecloth, but the

pudding itself was decorated with a piece of paper bearing the legend:

'I wish the mice
Would eat the rice
And then the pudding would be nice.'

As a result of this indirect appeal the obnoxious viand was banished from the menu. Nevertheless the repasts continued to be plain—very plain—and it was with great indignation that the girls discovered that when the authorities entertained guests a very different order prevailed. They could see trays passing backwards and forwards groaning beneath the weight of succulent roast fowls, delicately browned cutlets, above all, pastry—pastry of the flakiest and jammiest description.

A council was summoned in the secret hiding-place.

'I'll tell you what it is, girls,' cried my mother. 'If they don't give us proper things to eat, we'll take them.'

'Yes;' chimed in Ellen, who was always in the forefront of things, 'we'll steal them.'

'But, but,' faltered one of the others, 'shan't we get into a prodigious scrape?'

'Besides, how can we do it?' asked somebody else.

'Ellen and I will do it,' resumed my mother. 'We'll just wait in the passage till the trays come out and snatch them.'

'Yes;' agreed Ellen eagerly. 'Old Simmy Monica is so fat, she'll never be able to catch us.'

'We'll all do it!' declared the others with enthusiasm, and the ringleaders reluctantly agreed.

When 'Simmy Monica'—the name was a corruption of Sister Mary Monica—what schoolgirl could be bothered to pronounce so many syllables?—was waddling out of the guest-room with her tray that evening, she was surrounded by a variety of flying forms; eager little hands swooped into the dish, and then with a whisk of skirts and a patter of hurrying feet, the culprits disappeared.

But before the stolen dainties could be partaken of at ease in the hiding-place, the conspirators found themselves suddenly summoned. Hastily were the luscious morsels consigned to the pockets of their white muslin frocks, and with flushed countenances they presented themselves in the big parlour. To their surprise the Superioress received them with a benign countenance. Two or three high ecclesiastics were still at table; the head mistress was also present.

'Now,' said Reverend Mother, smiling, 'shall we have that little recitation?'

The highest of the high ecclestiastics nodded approval, and the seven wicked sinners with beating hearts and bulging pockets were marshalled in a row and desired to begin.

So great was my mother's inward turmoil that she never could remember how she got through

her share of the scene from *Athalie* which was the piece in question. She was only conscious of her pocket, which seemed to be growing bigger and heavier every moment, while one horrified glance at Ellen's dress revealed the fact that the jam was slowly oozing through the transparent folds. Their eyes met and the words froze on my mother's lips. But the lofty and benign ladies in their flowing robes seemed to be quite unaware that anything was amiss.

When the welcome permission to withdraw was given, and the girls filed past the head mistress, she did indeed lay a detaining hand on Ellen's arm.

'What is that stain upon your skirt, my dear?'

Ellen glanced down at the spreading smear, and then back at the mild, inquiring face.

'I think it—it—it looks like jam,' she faltered.

Hurriedly did the guilty seven hasten to their lair, quickly did they devour their booty. The jam tarts were excellent; indeed, the sense of having successfully accomplished so notable an achievement was certainly exhilarating, but the pangs of conscience began to make themselves felt. At length the question was voiced:—Was it a sin to steal jam tarts?

'Simmy Monica saw us do it,' said someone, 'so it wasn't *exactly* stealing.'

'She'll tell, and then we'll hear what they think,' said somebody else.

But 'they' never said anything; no one was scolded, no disapproving remarks of a general nature such as attended most school delinquencies were made. Simmy Monica apparently had not told. The dreadful proposition was next mooted: —If it was a sin, ought not the guilty ones themselves to confess it?

Ellen was finally heroic enough to volunteer to lay the case before the chaplain.

'If he says it was really a sin, I'll nod to you when I come out,' she said, 'and you can all own up too. But if he says it was no harm, I'll shake my head.'

The culprits waited anxiously during the absence of the valiant Ellen, and could hardly breathe when she presently reappeared: her face was wreathed in smiles and she wagged her head violently from side to side.

The seven sinners scampered away to the hiding-place and there eagerly questioned her.

'Did he say it wasn't a sin? Did he say it was no harm?'

He didn't say anything at all,' declared Ellen. 'I saw his shoulders shaking, and he covered his mouth with his hand. I think he was laughing. I told him, of course, that we didn't think it fair that they should have all the good things in the guest room while we were put off with such horrible puddings——'

She paused a moment reflectively, while the other delinquents sighed with relief.

'It's my belief,' she added, 'that he knew all about it all the time.'

The truth flashed upon the assembly; they *all* knew! Perhaps the door had been left partially open and they had seen the raid for themselves; perhaps after all Simmy Monica *had* told and the assembled guests had welcomed the episode as a break in the formality of the gathering. Perhaps the jam had betrayed the whole conspiracy—if conspiracy it could be called.

In any case the good-humoured tolerance of the authorities effectually prevented a repetition of the offence. Possibly it sharpened the schoolgirls' sense of honour, possibly in doing away with the element of risk it robbed the adventure of its savour. The fact remained, the seven wild girls stole no more jam tarts.

CHAPTER V

VISITS TO DUBLIN

THE periodical visits to the dentist are among the trials of every child's life, but little folks of the present day have a much easier time of it than we had. There was no gas thought of when I was a little girl, no chloroform, except for severe operations. You simply sat in that horrible green chair, which was screwed up until your short legs stuck out at right-angles to the rest of your little person; large fingers and equally large instruments were intruded into your small mouth, and, as often as not, you were bereft of two or three teeth at a sitting.

Nevertheless, strange to say, an expedition to the dentist was not by any means a source of sorrow to us. It meant, to begin with, a journey to Dublin, and a sojourn of two or three days at a certain old-fashioned family hotel, which had been so long patronised by members of our family that we were generally received there as children of the house.

We set out, in fact, on the enterprise in the greatest possible spirits; full of excitement over the journey by train, having biscuits at unusual hours, listening to the leisurely conversation of

porters and guards during the endless waits at the wayside stations. Everybody knows how these conversations are conducted in Ireland; how the guard strolls about the platform, while a sleepy-looking porter or two makes inquiries about mutual friends, or discourses on the state of politics.

'It's time for us to be getting along now,' says the guard, looking absently up and down the platform.

'Maybe so,' responds the porter; adding, perhaps, that he heard Mrs. So-and-so was thinking of going on this train.

'There doesn't seem to be much sign of her,' resumes the higher official, again looking about him, 'and we're behind time anyway.'

Then the green flag is waved, the whistle is sounded, and we move off.

One of our neighbours, a lady of somewhat dilatory habits, was accustomed to signal with her parasol from the top of the bridge which overlooked the line, and woe to the guard or the engine-driver who ventured to proceed on the journey until she had had ample leisure for the taking of tickets, the identifying of innumerable packages, and the careful selection of that compartment which seemed to her most inviting.

'It would be a poor train that wouldn't wait for your ladyship,' remarked the sympathetic station-master on one occasion, when a guard had been so ill-advised as to proceed on his journey before she

had had time to appear at her point of vantage, 'but, sure, we didn't know you were comin'.'

On arriving at Kingsbridge station it was equally delightful and exciting to drive in a rickety and rattling cab along the terribly ill-paved quays by the side of the odoriferous Liffey. And then, arriving at the hotel in Nassau Street, being received by the landlady with an affection little short of maternal, finding that Mary, our own waitress, was still there, and that Anne, the chambermaid, was hovering on the stairs to make audible and flattering remarks about our extraordinary growth and prepossessing appearance.

What fun to run into the queer old-fashioned bedrooms and choose which of the two odd-looking four-posters Gertie and I would sleep in, and which Shuzzey might keep for herself. Everything was pleasant—from the uneven floor of the old house to the smell of the queer cakes of soap; even the glimpse of the soda-water maker's yard on which our bedroom windows looked out seemed to us a refreshing change from the trees and hills at home.

Having washed our hands, changed our dresses, and suffered our hair to be wound round Shuzzey's finger into the abominable little corkscrew curls which my mother detested, but which Shuzzey deemed essential to important occasions, we sallied downstairs and out of doors into the most fascinating of all streets—a street that contained, within a few paces of each other, a circulating

library, a cake-shop, and an establishment which bore the legend: 'FITZPATRICK. PURE CONFECTIONER.'

On the same merciful principle, no doubt, as that which permits the last meal of the condemned prisoner to be a particularly luxurious one, it was granted to us, in view of our prospective sufferings on the morrow, to indulge to the full in all such commodities as were usually forbidden.

Having provided ourselves, therefore, with paper bags containing saffron cakes and little sugared dainties known as 'Penny Plums,' we proceeded to the establishment of the immaculate vendor of bulls'-eyes and almond toffee, and purchased various threepenn'orths of his wares. Then we betook ourselves with joyful hearts to Morrow's Library.

With what rapture did we approach those dusty shelves in the corner, which contained the tattered and much-bethumbed volumes of the Juvenile Department, and with what eager adventurous fingers did we rifle them. The librarian must have been an exceedingly good-natured man, for we certainly carried away many more volumes than were included in our subscription. Laden with these treasures we wandered blissfully back to the hotel, there to find a table spread for the high tea which was one of the features of the evening.

Large flat mutton chops—I have never seen such chops elsewhere; muffins—the visit to Dublin

would have been nothing without muffins; tea which had a peculiar flavour of straw; and cherry jam for us. In addition to these good things Shuzzey invariably ordered a pint of 'sweet ale' on her own account, which she sipped with so much gusto that we imagined it to be some kind of ambrosia, until one day, in her absence, we surreptitiously tasted it. It was not sweet at all —another proof of the duplicity of grown-up folks.

After tea, we stationed ourselves for a while in the bow window, watching the 'college boys,' as we irreverently termed the undergraduates of Trinity College, disporting themselves in their cricket field, and the people passing in the streets. Sometimes we saw soldiers—an interesting and exciting spectacle, particularly when they chanced to belong to a Highland regiment. Now and then an organ-grinder ground out some doleful ditty immediately under our windows, or a fishwife would pass by, walking noiselessly on bare feet, and carrying her heavy basket poised on a tangled mop of hair. The air would resound with her cry: 'Dublin Bee herrin', Dublin Bee herrin'!' mingling with that of the seller of 'Honey coo-o-mb.'

We used to imitate these cries when it got dark, and we began to feel a little fidgety about the legs and heavy about the eyes. We would have scorned to relinquish the privilege of sitting up half-an-hour later, which was one of the glories of this emancipated time.

On the morrow, however, things assumed a different aspect. We had not slept so well, after all, in the big four-poster—which was provided with a feather-bed that made hillocks and hollows in the wrong places—as we were wont to do in our own little cots at home. Breakfast of tea and eggs and bacon was not, perhaps, so wholly satisfying as bread and milk in the favourite blue and white bowl; and, then—the dentist loomed ahead! The appointment was invariably fixed for eleven o'clock, and although he lived only a stone's throw from our hotel, we set out a full half-hour before the allotted time, Shuzzey in the middle, very grand in her black silk, a hapless little victim clinging to either hand, afraid of the crossings, disliking the noise of the steets, pausing with palpitating heart on that dreadful doorstep before the black door, in the fanlight above which an odious effigy of a white horse pranced in a mocking manner which seemed to add to our sufferings.

'Oh, yes, m'm, the doctor is in, and is expecting the young ladies,' said the man who answered the door—a horrible little black man, we called him, though, as a matter of fact, it was only his hair which was black. His face was invariably wreathed with smiles, which increased our affliction, for we felt that in some indefinite way he jeered at our fears, and rejoiced in our torments.

Then came the waiting-room—a long, dark room, with a table covered with the usual display of

picture papers—not so plentiful in those days—and provided as well with a few odd volumes of novels.

Gertie immediately possessed herself of one of these, while I went to the window, where a stereoscope had been placed, the handles of which I drearily turned, gazing with almost unseeing eyes at views of waterfalls, mountains, forests, and other scenes calculated to charm the infant mind.

The door would open every now and then, and Shuzzey would feign great surprise at the postponement of our turn.

'We have an appointment, sir,' she would say, addressing the little black man with much severity.

We also would feign indignation. Nevertheless, it was with a sense of relief that we heard the fatal moment was to be postponed for yet a little longer.

At last the dreaded summons came.

'Now, m'm, if you please.'

Down went Gertie's novel, and I came slowly away from the stereoscope.

The dentist was a very kind, benevolent, grey-haired old man, but he was disposed to be facetious in his dealings with children, and to make light of their tremors and anguish.

'Why, you ought to be ashamed of making a fuss about a little thing like that,' he would say, holding up a small gory tooth before the eyes of the late owner, who considered herself remarkably virtuous in not crying out loud.

Sometimes he pulled out these little first teeth of

ours with his finger and thumb, at which we were much insulted, deeming this act a kind of infringement of our prerogative. On one occasion he accidentally pulled out the wrong tooth, and admitted the error with a laugh.

'I believe I must try again,' he said.

Aggie was the sufferer on this occasion; she was a decided young person, as I have already remarked, and protested with great promptness and decision.

'When people get too old to see what they are doing, I think they had better leave off being dentists,' she remarked.

'Oh, for shame, miss,' said Shuzzey warningly.

The dentist looked oddly crestfallen. 'In the name of goodness how old is this child?' he inquired. She was not yet six.

He removed the right tooth without further remark, but unaccountably omitted to present the large squashy French bonbon with which he generally used to reward the young sufferers as they descended from that slippery chair.

Nellie made no remarks, but threw all her energies into a fierce and determined chewing of his fingers whenever he was incautious enough to dispense with instruments in her case.

Well, it was over at length, and we came away holding our handkerchiefs to our poor little mouths and trying to feel very jubilant. We received a shilling as compensation for each tooth of which

we had been robbed, and we immediately proceeded to the toyshop to dispose of this sudden access of wealth, and of such pennies as we had previously managed to hoard. My tastes usually led me to the sixpenny counter, where I bought a variety of useless objects; but Gertie was wiser, and invested her money either in one good toy or in a book—most frequently one of those delightful volumes of *Magnet Stories,* which, to my mind, surpassed in excellence any child-literature of the present day.

An aunt of ours, the widow of one of my father's step-brothers, who had been very much older than himself, used to pay periodical visits to my mother. She was an Englishwoman, a lady of the old school, very kind and generous, but extremely strict in her views, and prone to point out our faults and failings. She used to bring us very handsome presents, and the day of her arrival was generally one of jubilation. Once she gave us each a doll far too beautiful to be played with. I can see these dolls now. They were very large indeed, and dressed in white silk, trimmed with narrow bands of red velvet ornamented with pearls. We were quite dazzled when they were put into our arms, but we had no sooner carried them off to our own quarters than we looked dubiously at each other. They had wax hair of the kind already lamented in our baby-dolls, but as these dolls were distinctly grown-up, this hair could not be covered with little caps. Moreover, their gorgeous dresses would not

take on and off; not only were they firmly stitched together, but actually to the backs and waists of the wearers. The little lace-trimmed 'pantalettes,' which appeared to be such as Dickens's 'Infant Phenomenon' herself might have worn, were only make-believe. They were stitched to each doll's lower limbs about half-way up the thigh. What could be done with things like that? One could not play with grown-up young ladies, nor even put them to bed in their clothes.

'Gertie,' I whispered at length, 'I hate my doll!'

'So do I,' said Gertie; and then she grimaced at the object in question: 'Yah! you nasty thing!'

When Shuzzey, who was lost in admiration, informed us that the new dolls were too good to be played with every day, and proposed to put them by safely for the present, she was surprised to see how readily we agreed.

Our aunt thought little girls ought to sit quiet in the evening, and so the fact of our not bringing her gifts downstairs did not excite any comment.

Another time she gave us really beautiful work-boxes, much too expensive for children of our age. They were inlaid, and fitted with ivory; each, moreover, bore our initials. Gertie's was lined with blue satin and mine with magenta. There were silk reels of every colour, silver thimbles, scissors, bodkins, needles, everything one could

possibly imagine—only we hated sewing! We had hoped for books, and when these magnificent boxes were placed in our hands, I am afraid our faces fell. The dear old lady preached a little sermon about the advisability of being sensible now we were such great girls—I think our ages were then respectively eight and ten—and of trying to be useful instead of frittering away our time.

Each work-box had a lock and key—that was perhaps its most attractive point in our eyes. It was rather a proud moment for us when we produced these keys and unlocked the boxes, in order to display their contents to the admiring eyes of the servants.

'Why, those boxes must have cost pounds and pounds!' said the nursery-maid. 'You ought to be down on your knees thanking your aunt, Miss Mollie.'

I had already thanked my aunt, though not on my knees, but I looked on my new possession thenceforth with increased respect.

When my mother paid return visits to her sister-in-law, she generally took Gertie and me with her, and, though it was always a joy and excitement to go away with my mother, our spirits used to sink somewhat on approaching the big house in Dublin where my aunt lived. She did not like strange servants, therefore neither nurse nor maid accompanied us, and we had a forlorn feeling in consequence. It was true Mary Dardas, my

aunt's maid, and her niece, Mary Dempsie, were great friends of ours, and we always looked forward to their welcome. They had so much to say about our growth, and the wonderful length and beauty of our hair, and wasn't Miss Gertrude turning out the image of her mamma, and hadn't Miss Mary got wonderfully sharp, that we thought them very kind and unusually intelligent. It was rather fun, too, when they took off our outdoor clothes in that bedroom up so many flights and flights of stairs, to be asked how we liked to have our hair brushed, and if we wished to have our pinafores on or not—we felt quite grown-up as we gave our orders.

There were generally cutlets for luncheon, too, and a pudding in which we revelled. It was made in a soufflé-dish which we called a big jampot, and was indeed a sort of soufflé with jam at the bottom. In the afternoon of that first day, too, Mary Dempsie, who was young and good-natured, would play games with us.

All in fact went merrily until we came down to dessert, but then our troubles began. Our aunt had views on what was wholesome—plum-cake was considered too rich, fresh fruit too heavy at night, while the preserved variety was 'destruction for the teeth.' We were obliged to content ourselves with biscuits, and even these we had to eat straight off in a prosaic and uninteresting way, instead of playing with them as we were allowed to do at home. We might not break the biscuit in two, and

then, holding the halves tightly pressed together, invite each other to guess where the crack was; we might not make brown water with our ginger biscuits, or squeeze the softer ones until they could be moulded into shapes.

It was generally when we were seated at the table, too, that my aunt used to reprove Gertie for stooping, or me for blinking oftener than was necessary. Between nervousness and a sort of impishness, I used then to blink harder than ever.

When we emerged from the dining-room I remember the immense height of the staircase used to impress us disagreeably. It was quite light in the gas-lit hall and up to the second floor landing; but at the top of the house, where we slept, there was no light at all except the glimmer of Mary Dardas' candle. Shiveringly we used to beg our mother's leave to sit up late as a treat, and, on permission being granted, would follow the two ladies into the big drawing-room, which was always dark in the corners, and where the furniture cast such funny shadows. There we children sat on two beaded stools listening to my aunt's discourse about Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone, or about different grown-up members of the family. Our eyes would grow heavy, and our backs would ache and those dreadful bead roses on which we were sitting would imprint themselves on the backs of our poor little bare legs. We were not allowed to read, for our hostess thought story-books foolish, and our work

was not yet unpacked—a fact for which we were devoutly thankful. My mother would occasionally suggest our going to bed, but would give way to our eagerly-worded protests, for the thought of that dark upper story stimulated wakefulness.

'Are not children extraordinary things?' my mother would say, laughing. 'They are almost tumbling off their stools with sleep, and yet they would rather sit up, for the pure honour and glory of it, I suppose.'

My aunt would pause in her discourse about Mr. Disraeli to gaze at us with a kind of disapproving indulgence, and then would resume her criticism of that eminent statesman; my mother, who had always been an admirer of his, making a protest every now and then.

At length, however, our departure could no longer be postponed. The bell was rung, the old butler was dispatched in search of Mary Dardas, and having said 'good night,' and been desired not to put our hands on the wall-paper as we went upstairs, we climbed with her to the shadowy upper regions. Mary Dardas had left her candle on the top landing, where it cast ghostly and gigantic shadows. The big room where we were to sleep looked very mysterious and alarming, with its two white-curtained beds standing at a little distance from the wall, so that a man might easily hide behind them; those beds had also white valances, under which a man could easily crawl. There was

a big dark cupboard in the corner, the doors of which creaked when opened; the fire was making little flickering, spitting noises, rather uncanny to listen to.

With how many blandishments did we try to delay the departure of Mary Dardas when, having duly undressed and washed us, and plaited our hair into pigtails, she proposed to leave us.

'Do stay and tell us a story, Mary,' we pleaded.

But Mary said she was sure the mistress would not approve of the young ladies being told stories when they ought to be going to sleep.

'Then stay,' we besought her. '*Do* stay, dear Mary, till we *do* fall asleep.''

But Mary was busy, it seemed; she had one or two little things to do for the mistress before prayers. She said 'good night' to us cheerfully, and took up her candle. Then Gertie started upright in her bed.

'Well, Mary,' she said indignantly, 'considering we are going to sleep in a strange place, I think you might at least leave the candle.'

Mary paused with a surprised look.

'Why, it's not afraid you are!' she exclaimed. 'Such big young ladies and all. And what in the world would you be afraid of in a *town* house? Sure, you can hear the cars and cabs driving all night.'

That was just one of the things that had struck us as alarming. Those distant sounds of traffic

reminded us what a big place Dublin was and what a lot of people lived there—some of them wicked people—so at least Shuzzey said. A robber might at that very moment be hiding under one of our beds. But Mary Dardas' air of rather contemptuous surprise at Gertie's remonstrance, and her evident disbelief in any unworthy fears on our part, sealed our lips. She poked the fire as a sort of compromise, and went out of the room.

There we lay quaking, starting at every sound, now and then almost jumping out of our skins when the cupboard door gave a sudden creak.

'Mollie,' said Gertie, in a tremulous whisper. 'Do you think there could be a man in that press?'

'Mary Dardas locked the door,' I said.

The distant voice of a tipsy reveller presently broke on our ears, and I nearly cried with terror.

'It's only in the street,' said Gertie, who was this time the braver of the two.

'It sounds—it sounds like a murderer,' I murmured.

But the voice died away and comparative quiet reigned. A little flame leaped up in the grate, and I saw something which made my heart stand still.

Mary Dardas had, before leaving the room, drawn out the curtain of my bed which was nearest the door to its fullest extent, so that it hung quite straight without any folds. In the bright firelight I now saw that the middle of this curtain appeared to be clutched by a hidden hand.

Drawing myself up a little, I stared at it with starting eyes. There, in the middle, the white dimity was certainly gripped by something or somebody. I did not dare call out to Gertie lest I should hasten the impending attack, for I felt quite sure that some dreadful man had really been hiding behind my bed just where the shadows were so dark, and was only waiting for me to fall asleep to murder me at his ease—in fact, he had probably been in the act of creeping out from his lair to make an end of me when the sudden leaping up of the firelight had caused him to pause. He was clutching the curtain now! I could hardly breathe as I crouched there, and should have been quite incapable of moving or crying out, even if prudence had not forbidden it.

Gertie's quiet breathing told me that she at last had fallen asleep. I felt it was in a manner cowardly of her to succumb like that, and leave me all alone to face such danger. If the man murdered her too, as was probable, she would at least know nothing about it. The flame had died down, and the room was nearly dark again, but I saw or fancied I saw the folds of the curtain still clutched. At length, after an eternity of agony, I heard the welcome sound of a footstep on the stairs, and presently the door opened, and Mary Dardas peered in, candle in hand. Then I recovered power of speech, or rather of shrieking.

The good woman hastened in, much scandalised,

to inquire what was the matter. No sooner was she within the room than I looked hastily round the curtain, only to discover that the cause of my alarm was a very simple one; nothing in fact but a big darning needle which had been stuck into the folds of the dimity. I felt unspeakably relieved, but at the same time foolish beyond description. I could not bring myself to reveal the truth to Mary Dardas, and when she suggested that I must have been dreaming, I cuddled down among my bedclothes without contradicting her.

After the first excitement of ham at breakfast in the mornings—an excitement which was tempered, however, with disappointment, for we were not allowed to eat it in sandwich fashion between slices of bread and butter, or even to cut it up for ourselves in a dignified grown-up way, but had to submit to its being cut up for us into uninteresting small pieces, which we subsequently ate with a fork —we settled down to a period of unmixed dullness.

The general procedure on these occasions was heralded by a remark from my aunt: 'I have ordered the carriage at eleven o'clock. Will you kindly see that the children are ready in good time, Margaret?'

My mother hastily promised that we should be ready.

'I think you said you did not care to drive?' the old lady would continue, in rather a formal tone, but with a glance which seemed to imply that my

mother was free, even then, to change her mind if she liked. But it generally transpired that my mother had some shopping to do.

At eleven o'clock, therefore, having been inducted into our clothes with what we felt to be almost indecent haste, we came downstairs, finding our aunt not infrequently waiting in the hall. Presently the butler opened the front door, and there was the carriage. This carriage was a 'Clarence,' a huge roomy closed vehicle which had been recently mounted on cee springs; it could have easily contained six, and we were rather lost as we sat on the cream-coloured cushions opposite our aunt. We found our short legs difficult to manage, for if we sat back on the wide seat our legs stuck straight out, and there was the danger of their coming in contact with her dress, while if we sat forward enough for them to hang down we were liable to tumble into her lap when the carriage stopped. At first there had been a certain sense of exhilaration in driving in this big carriage, and in taking notice of the difference between that and our carriages at home, and in noting, moreover, that whereas Coss, our coachman, was fat and wore top boots, our aunt's coachman was thin and had long whitey-brown gaiters, with an enormous number of buttons.

The door was closed, the steps were rolled up, and the old groom, who was grey-haired like the coachman, inquired respectfully: 'Where to, ma'am?'

'I will drive,' said my aunt, 'round the Donnybrook Road.'

Then she pulled up the window to within six inches of the top, and we set off. Anyone who knew the Donnybrook Road at the time of which I write, when it was considerably less populous than it has since become, will realise the depth of our depression. And when we looked from the dull exterior prospect to the grave countenance of our aunt, our spirits certainly did not rise. She understood nothing at all about children. Having seen that we were warm and presumably comfortable, she made no further remark, except an occasional reminder not to crush her dress, or not to fidget. She further informed us that it was not good manners to whisper together, and that it was not desirable that we should flatten our noses against the windows. But I have no doubt whatever that when we stiffly alighted from the carriage steps, which were previously 'let down' by the groom, she prided herself on having given us a real treat.

We had not even the jampot pudding, as we called it, to console us after these drives. It was reserved for the day of arrival. We had generally cabinet puddings, pale and uninteresting, ornamented with large flat raisins, or rice shape, or bread-and-butter pudding, which we only liked at home because then we could ask for more

'scrapings,' as we called the top and the brown part which sticks to the dish.

'I wish,' said Gertie one day, 'somebody would invent a pudding that would be all scrapings.'

Oh, the dreadful, dreadful tedium of those days! My aunt never went out in the afternoon, and was quite surprised that anybody else should want to do so. My mother, to atone for her independence of the morning, was obliged to bear her company at home, where they sometimes received visitors and sometimes wrote letters, or read the newspapers and stitched at their tapestry work—an occupation which my dear mother loathed as much as we did.

On very, very rare occasions Mary Dempsie or Mary Dardas—they were always given their full names to distinguish them from each other—would take us for a short run, but not often, for my mother was always made to understand it was most inconvenient.

Once or twice—and these were blissful afternoons—we were allowed to go and play, in the square on which my aunt's house looked out, with the children of one of her acquaintances.

We missed our lessons, though we were supposed to be much enjoying these holidays. As I have said before, my aunt did not approve of children being allowed to fritter away their time reading foolish tales, therefore our usual happy visits to the circulating library were taboo, and we felt perfectly starved for want of books.

One morning we happened to be down some time before breakfast, and wandered into a room into which we had not hitherto penetrated. It had been used by our deceased uncle, and to our great joy the walls were lined with bookcases.

'Gertie!' I screamed rapturously, 'there are such lots of books! I am sure we might read some of them.'

Gertie agreed that, as we were allowed to read some of the books in the library at home, we should probably be allowed to read some of the books in *this* library.

But my aunt was rather a formidable person to beg a favour of, and in any case we really felt we could not wait until she came down. All the bookcases were locked, to be sure, but they were not glazed like our bookcases at home, only screened from the curious by a wire lattice-work, like Mobie's linen cupboard. We soon discovered that if Gertie pulled hard at this a small aperture was perceptible above the lock, and that if I climbed upon a chair and poked my extremely tiny hand through the lattice, I could abstract and squeeze a thin book through this crack. We were hard at work, when a sudden: 'Well, to be sure!' caused us both to start, and Gertie to let go so suddenly that my poor little wrist was nearly broken.

Mary Dardas, armed with a duster, was standing in a state of stupefaction.

We explained the circumstances to her, and even

confided to her what a dreadful deprivation it was not to have anything to read, and she smiled quite pleasantly and appeared to understand, but advised us to give up trying to help ourselves, and to wait until our aunt came to unlock the bookcase for us.

But, lo and behold! She went straight off to tell the old lady what she had found us doing, and we received a very severe scolding in consequence —two scoldings in fact, for our mother was much mortified that we should have so misconducted ourselves.

We felt that Mary Dardas, whom we had looked on as a friend, had proved herself to be a traitor. Henceforth we could never take pleasure in her society, or indeed speak to her with anything but distant politeness. She, on her side, resented this change of attitude, and as Mary Dempsie took her cue from her aunt, the big gloomy house was shorn of its chief attraction, and we were glad indeed when our stay came to an end.

One particular visit to Dublin stands out in my memory. It had long been talked about, for, in addition to the joy of staying at the hotel before mentioned, we were told that we should be taken to see a pantomime. The glories of the prospective entertainment were dwelt on with much gusto by our nurses, and even by Miss Larkin herself, and we looked forward to it as we had never hitherto looked forward to anything.

Unfortunately, about a week before the appointed

time I managed to catch an extremely severe cold, which finally settled on my chest; in fact, I was suffering from rather acute bronchitis. Nowadays, such a thing could not possibly have been allowed to pass unnoticed, but then parents and children met less frequently. Moreover, colds were not considered of very much importance. Gertie was extremely anxious that I should conceal the fact of my indisposition from the authorities, and used to scold me severely at each fresh access of coughing.

'If they hear you, you won't be allowed to go to the pantomime,' she would say, holding up an admonitory forefinger. 'Don't you *want* to go to the pantomime?'

Therefore, I choked down my cough in the presence of the elders, and stuffed the corner of my pillow into my mouth at night.

The forty-mile journey by train naturally did not improve matters, and when the evening came on which the great treat was to take place I looked so ill that my mother's attention was aroused. However, the united tears and lamentations and entreaties of Gertie and myself prevailed, and I was taken, well wrapped up, to the Theatre Royal.

But one's sins find one out. I was far too ill to enjoy anything. My poor little head ached too much to permit me to follow the adventures of Red Riding Hood with any real interest, or to be more than faintly amused when the Wolf, having crept

into bed, carefully tucked in his tail between the blankets. The frolics of the Clown and Pantaloon provoked no responsive laughter on my part, and in the end all became confused. I was taken away, I think, before the end of the performance, and in the night became almost light-headed. I remember wandering round and round the unfamiliar room —being unwilling to wake the snoring nurse— searching vainly for water. At last, to my joy, my hand encountered the water-jug, which was too heavy for me to lift; but I stood for some time dipping my fingers into it and sucking them afterwards. My bronchitis, in consequence of these midnight wanderings, ended in an attack of congestion of the lungs.

I was very ill for many weeks, and after the first few fevered days rather enjoyed the experience. I had such a nice, kind doctor; everyone was so full of sympathetic interest. I used to hear people pausing in the lobby to ask how the little girl was to-day; a kindly chambermaid paid me long visits, relating such stories as she thought calculated to enliven and amuse me, and, best of all, my mother read out *David Copperfield* during the period of convalescence.

Convalescence was delightful. The being carried to the sitting-room, having a little hot bird on toast all to oneself, when the rest of the party had mutton; going out for drives, sometimes with my mother, sometimes in the doctor's carriage, for he

took an immense interest in his small patient. I was not expected to make conversation, but listened with great interest while he told me stories of other sick children, and related anecdotes of his own little ones; and I felt very proud and important in sitting well wrapped outside, while he went in to pay his professional calls. I used to speculate about them, and wonder, when his face was grave, whether the lady he had been to see was going to die; but he never would talk about his cases, though I ventured to put one or two timid questions.

All my hair was cut off; that in itself was a source of some elation. There were no more corkscrew ringlets now, and it was nice to feel quite different from every other member of my family.

When we returned to the country, I was 'let off' lessons for quite a long time. I used to feel vastly superior, lying on my sofa in a corner of the schoolroom, and used to correct my juniors for looking about, or for any other lack of diligence which came beneath my notice.

Then came an experience not quite so delightful —the resumption of ordinary life, the being put back in one's place, receiving corrections and admonitions just like anybody else. It seemed quite strange, and I was disposed to think my superiors heartless, and to be wounded when a small sister returned: 'Do it yourself,' when I had, as before, requested her to fetch and carry for me.

CHAPTER VI

LONG ISLAND.

We were still very small when we became 'schoolroom children,' for our father and mother were often obliged to be away from home, and Miss Larkin, an old governess who had lived for many years in another branch of the family, was left in supreme charge.

Our schoolroom then was a large, very pretty room, with a rosebud paper on the walls, and a bow window which looked out on shrubberies and green banks. Sometimes when the weather was fine we were allowed to roll down these sloping banks, on the top of one of which was a weeping ash-tree, which we used to call 'our house,' and the green drooping branches of which we pretended were curtains.

Our schoolroom curtains were green, with little knots of rosebuds to match the paper, and I used to tie bunches of daisies on the inner side of the ash twigs in order to reproduce the effect in the curtains of our 'tree house.' But this took me a long time, as I could not tie bows very well at that age, and the worst of it was that the daisies withered before I was able to judge of the effect.

I used often to look longingly out of the bow window at the green house out of doors, when I was supposed to be learning *a b ab*—a syllable which much offended me; in fact I once ventured to say to Miss Larkin: 'There's no such thing as "ab."'

When my own lessons were finished—and indeed they did not take very long—I was allowed to wash Gertie's slate, a task I loved.

Nellie was not supposed to learn lessons at this time, but she used to creep into the schoolroom with me, and sit on the floor watching me, with solemn admiring eyes.

'I'd like to do lessons,' she said to me once. 'Then I could wash Gertie's slate.'

'No; Miss Larkin said I was to wash the slate,' I said firmly. 'And you'd hate lessons anyhow.'

'What do you do at lessons?' continued Nellie.

'Oh, there's copy, you know,' I explained, being very condescending to this ignorant little girl. 'You have to begin with strokes, but I am at pot-hooks and hangers, and Gertie's doing "o's." And then there's spelling—I hate spelling.'

Here I turned over the slate, gave the little sponge a fresh dip in the jampot of water, and began on the other side.

Nellie picked up the spelling-book and crept under the table with it. When Miss Larkin presently inquired where she was, I informed her, giggling, that Nellie was pretending to read.

No objection was made to an amusement which kept her so quiet, and it soon came to be an established custom that while Gertie learnt spelling and 'jografy' and I washed her slate, Nellie should sit under the table with my spelling-book. One day Miss Larkin suddenly discovered that Nellie had actually taught herself to read—in a most peculiar way, it must be admitted, and pronouncing the words after a fashion of her own; nevertheless the fact remained, while we, her elders, were still stumbling over disconnected words, she was able to read fluently before she was four years old. Soon there was not a story-book on our shelves which she had not read.

Story-books! There is magic in the very word. I wonder if many grown-up people recall as I do, the joy of finding out that what had hitherto been a difficult labour could suddenly become a delight! How passionately we all loved reading, and how greedily we devoured every book which came in our way. All Gertie's pocket-money went in books, but though she was the richest among us, receiving three whole pennies every week when she was good and no fines were deducted, she had to save for a long time before she could buy *Countess Kate*, or a volume of *The Magnet Stories*.

I only had twopence a week, and very seldom that, for I was often in trouble, and Nellie's penny was hardly worth saving. One evening, however,

when we came into the library after dessert, Gertie had another 'insp'ration.'

'There's such rows and rows of books here, mamma, can't we read some of them?'

'You do read some of them,' answered my mother; 'you've had *The Parents' Assistant,* and *Harry and Lucy,* and *The Parents' Cabinet.* Those are the books I used to read when I was a little girl.'

'We've read them all over and over again,' said Gertie mournfully; then, plucking up courage: 'Couldn't we read some of *your* books, mamma?'

My mother looked at us and hesitated.

'What books do you suppose would be suitable for little people like you?' she asked, then rising, she moved towards one of the big book-cases.

'There's Dickens,' she said dubiously. 'Do you think you are old enough to care for Dickens?'

Were we old enough to care for Dickens! We executed a kind of war-dance on the spot. I began to quote Sam Weller, and implored my mother to give me Mr. Pickwick, while Gertie petitioned for 'the one about Dotheboys Hall'—as may be guessed we had already made acquaintance with sundry pages of these master-pieces. The younger children were each given a volume of Miss Edgeworth's *Moral Tales.*

I can see those two fat Dickens' volumes now; they were the leather-bound first editions, with illustrations by Phiz. How many happy hours did

we spend in their company! We were not allowed to read story-books in the morning, but the afternoons were ours, and on fine days we used to carry our treasures out of doors to a private green snuggery of ours, where we passed some of the most blissful moments of our lives.

Dear 'Long Island!' How shall I describe its actual charm, still less the glamour with which our imaginations invested it? It was not an island at all, to begin with, and neither was it long, but rather round in shape; but for some reason our best beloved retreat was so christened. It was simply a flat-topped mound, formed, I suppose, by the upheaval of the soil caused by the partial fall of a very large tree. The roots of one or two smaller ones were entwined with it. A thick screen of bushes cut off this little hillock from the vulgar gaze; the roots made armchairs for small people to sit in, and the plateau between was covered with moss. 'Long Island' rose about three feet above the level of the sea of hemlock, dog-mercury, and other wild growth of the shrubberies. When the wind blew the branches of the tall trees overhead rustled bravely, and the blue-green pungent verdure underneath beat against the weedy banks of our island home like tiny waves.

I shall never forget the joy of discovering 'Long Island,' which we did accidentally while playing hide-and-seek; and of finding that there was a secret approach to it by a little path behind the

laurels and close to a wall, which, winding behind the big tree aforesaid, led us suddenly to this fairy bower! Not only were there bushes in front of 'Long Island,' but several elder saplings grew on it, so that once there no intrusive grown-up or impertinent gardener could possibly find one. This was our house, Gertie's and mine. We made a little broom of twigs tied together, and swept it diligently every day; we brought thither secret stores of hazel nuts and beech-mast; and moreover, true to our religious instincts, made an altar in a hollow in the tree trunk, with a cross of peeled hazel-sticks in the middle.

Here, snugly ensconced between the sheltering moss-grown arms of my rugged chair, did I read and laugh at the adventures of Mr. Pickwick, and here did I subsequently become acquainted with Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, and many another.

A still greater day awaited us that summer, when my mother began to read out the Waverley Novels. How we loved them! Only some of these required a certain amount of 'bowdlerising,' but my mother was an incomparable reader, and managed to 'skip' and dovetail so cleverly that we never found out that the tale was not presented to us in its entirety. How they lived for us—Roger Wildrake, and Cuddy Headrigg, and Meg Merrilees, and Diana Vernon. As for Lord Evandale—we adored him. Gertie threw herself upon the ground and positively

howled over his tragic end. She was found afterwards walking round the croquet ground, sighing to herself and murmuring at intervals: 'Poor Lord Evandale!'—and after tea the whole family were startled by hearing a succession of dismal sounds proceeding from the tinkling old schoolroom piano. It was Gertie, composing the dirge of Lord Evandale.

We used to talk broad Scotch to each other in those days, stringing odd phrases together with no particular concern as to their meaning. 'Aweel, aweel, I dinna ken,' Gertie would remark incidentally when helping herself to marmalade, for instance.

Even a weekly volume from the big library, a story-book or two in the box from Dublin, and the delightful readings of Scott, did not satisfy our craving for fiction, and by and bye, to our great delight, we discovered that Shuzzey was devoted to novel reading. How we made up to Shuzzey after we had found this out! Her real name was Mrs. Hughes, by the way, but we preferred to call her 'Mrs. Shuse'; gradually softening the title to 'Shuzzey.' Shuzzey was rather starched and stiff in outward appearance; she could look very severe on occasion, and used to bring out a birch rod from behind the looking-glass when we were naughty, which she would wave threateningly in the air, solemnly assuring us that she would most certainly make use of it the very next time we deserved it.

Dear old Shuzzey! I cannot recall her ever 'laying a finger,' as she would herself have expressed it, on one of us, except when Gertie climbed into the nursery cupboard. As a rule, when the brandishing of the rod failed to strike awe into the heart of the offender, Shuzzey would straightway report the delinquent at high quarters.

My mother has often told me how difficult she found it to look severe when Shuzzey, with a portentous knock at the library door, would march up some small sinner to be reprimanded. She herself always managed to maintain a scandalised expression, and to speak in a serious, not to say awful voice, but every now and then there would be a twinkle in the eye nearest to my mother—a twinkle which was indeed not infrequently succeeded by a wink very trying to the gravity of the beholder. Nevertheless my mother, composing her features with a struggle, would reply that she was shocked and surprised; the offender's eyes being fixed meanwhile, unwinkingly on her face, to find out if such were really the case.

If the lapse was of a flagrant order, the fine of a halfpenny was imposed, but, as a rule, we were let off with a reprimand. Indeed, that long transit across the house from the nursery quarters, the slow descent of the 'best stone stairs,' the crossing of the polished hall and the final progress down the long room to my mother's writing table, had a sufficiently subduing effect.

This is a long digression, but it is introduced to show that Shuzzey was not a person whom a casual observer would credit with a turn for romance. Nevertheless, when she was in a good humour, and we had sufficiently cajoled her, she would delight us with a *réchauffée* of the novel that she had last read, and this was an endless source of amusement to us. Even the combing out of our tangled locks became less painful when the operation was accompanied by the recital of the thrilling adventures of some of Miss Braddon's heroines.

Now and then we took possession of a book which was not meant for us, and were much puzzled and disturbed by the contents. I remember being almost frightened into fits by *The Phantom Ship*, for instance. My mother discovered me in the act of reading it (though it scared away my sleep at night), and was much displeased in consequence. I explained, in all good faith, that I thought I might read it because it had a yellow cover. Had she not herself once given me a book with a yellow cover? I had therefore thought it unnecessary to ask leave before reading this one. *The Phantom Ship* was immediately confiscated, and I have never since opened it, but to this day certain scenes and phrases stand out in my memory.

The terrors evoked by *The Phantom Ship* for a time overshadowed my joy in the solitude of 'Long Island,' though as a rule I, like many children, greatly coveted solitude.

One of the chief attractions which this retreat had for us was the absence of all supervision from nurse or governess. There would not have been room for Miss Larkin and her crinoline on the little plateau, and she generally walked about some other part of the shrubbery, or going a little nearer the garden, seated herself on a rustic bench under the huge yew-tree, which threw such a deep shadow over the spot where four paths met. On summer days this was an enchanting resting-place. You could look through the bars of the garden gate at the bright flower beds, and the mass of bloom in the central greenhouse; and smell the mingled scents of the old-fashioned flowers which grew in the borders nearest the gate, or the sweet pungency of the vine stalks and the little green grapes, when the gardener was pruning and thinning. Or if you turned round you could gaze up the New Walk, as a certain path was named, though it had probably been in existence many scores of years, for the trees were tall and the shrubs luxuriant; or you could look back at the house, nestling in the hollow, and mark the meeting of the green and copper beeches. Or if you went right round to the other side of the tree you could see a pleasant lawn, where certain rare conifers were growing, while along the grassy edge a little path meandered, which suddenly dipped and went down some rustic steps.

Half way up the New Walk was a group of

syringa trees, the distinctive scent of which always made Miss Larkin pause and sigh. One day we asked her the reason of this, and after much persuasion elicited the fact that the scent of the syringa reminded her of 'pleasure and of pain.' The phrase struck us as remarkable, and we discussed it much among ourselves, and finally Gertie, after adroit questioning, drew a further admission from Miss Larkin. She had met someone once near a syringa tree—but we were too young to understand, and in any case perhaps Miss Larkin did wrong in dwelling upon it.

We pondered over this aspect of the case gravely, and with some suspicion.

'It's my belief,' said Gertie, who, between the Waverley Novels and Shuzzey's extracts from Miss Braddon, besides sundry dips into the battered novels left out on the dentist's table, had acquired ideas rather in advance of her years; 'it's my belief that Miss Larkin had a cland'stine meeting with a young man under a syringa tree!'

When Johnny, our eldest brother, came back for his holidays that year, he had one or two skirmishes with Miss Larkin, who did not go home for her vacation until a week or two later, and was in consequence unfavourably disposed towards her. It was he who discovered that she dyed her hair, and had an ungovernable temper.

Miss Larkin had certainly displayed considerable heat when she found Master Johnny setting head-

lines in our copybooks in his sprawling schoolboy hand. Neither writing nor spelling were strong points of his, and her indignation broke forth when she found us laboriously copying—

Basstinado is desidedly painfull to man,

faithfully endeavouring to imitate his scrawl. While we on our side confided to the ear of this immensely superior, aged person of thirteen or fourteen, sundry grievances of our own—Miss Larkin had been so cross, Miss Larkin wouldn't let us do anything we liked, Miss Larkin was always complaining of us to mamma.

'And it isn't as if she'd always been so good herself,' declared Gertie; and thereupon she related to Johnny how the scent of the syringa reminded Miss Larkin of pleasure and of pain, and how it was her belief that Miss Larkin had had a cland'stine appointment with some gentleman in the far long ago when she had been young.

Poor, good, fat Miss Larkin! She was, I feel quite sure, always the very soul of rectitude, and if such a thing could be possible as that, in the days when Queen Victoria was in the nursery, she had flirted with some estimable young man, the prototype of her favourite Horace (Mary Catherine's brother), the affair must have been of a most innocent description. She probably only thought it wrong to recall it as promoting sentiment in herself and curiosity in us.

But Johnny took a different view; he considered

it a serious case, and was of the opinion that somebody should tell Miss Larkin that she ought to turn her thoughts to repentance.

A day or two later he electrified us by mysteriously summoning us to a disused chamber known as the 'Birds' Room'—because we had at one time kept a melancholy starling there—and exhibiting to us a cardboard placard on which he had painted this awful warning in red and black letters, two inches long—

REMEMBER THOU
THE SIN OF PASSION
THE SIN OF PRIDE
THE SIN OF THE SERINGA.

'I am going to hang this up,' said Johnny solemnly, 'in Miss Larkin's room behind the curtain where she keeps her dresses. When she draws it back she'll see it—and it will make her *think*.'

We were admiring and awe-struck, as we solemnly accompanied Johnny to the next room, which was Miss Larkin's, and saw him draw the curtains aside and hang his placard on one of the empty dress-hooks. It certainly looked very imposing. We felt almost compassionate when we pictured Miss Larkin's terror when it should meet her eye. Johnny replaced the curtains and led us from the room, desiring us not to go back there on any account as it might excite the servants'

suspicions. He went back to school before Miss Larkin's return, repeating his injunctions not to attempt to go near Miss Larkin's room after his departure.

We could hardly breathe with excitement when the poor woman did arrive, and lingered about the corridor while she unpacked and put away her clothes, momentarily expecting a cry, or perhaps a heavy fall, for we thought it extremely likely that she would faint at being thus suddenly confronted with this accusation of her iniquities. But we could hear her stumping about the room quite tranquilly, opening and shutting drawers and even pulling back the curtains—and nothing happened! When she joined us presently she was quite cheerful and more amiable than usual! After she had gone down to late dinner with our mother, Gertie and I ran hastily to her room and made a breathless search for the placard, but not a sign of it was visible. Johnny had no doubt thought better of his project at the last moment and had removed his awful warning, though he could not bring himself to lower his prestige in our eyes by owning as much to us, and had, in fact, repeated his prohibition with a view to keeping up the mystery.

CHAPTER VII

PICNICS

'THE sweet of the year,' when all is young, must surely be specially made for childhood. Does one ever in after-life feel the same thrill, the same rapture on some such glorious discovery as the first primrose or the first mushroom, the unfolding of baby buds, heretofore lying securely cradled in the hedge, or bluebells showing through their spiky leaves, or pimpernels growing by the wayside? What ordinary mortal cares for a pimpernel after he is grown-up? But, oh, the delight to a child of catching sight of the tiny scarlet flecks among the roadside weeds!

'Bluebell Wood' was our favourite haunt in the spring. One approached it by a steep, stony lane—stony, at least, in the middle, but flanked on either side by banks luxuriant with primroses and violets in the spring, with wild roses and tiny, sour strawberries in the summer; and then the nests in the hedges which topped the banks, the singing of the birds in the woods beyond!

These woods will abide in my memory as mysterious, green wildernesses, where, it seemed,

the foot of man had never penetrated. Our own little feet, indeed, seldom did. The beautiful, golden-green carpet of moss, which gleamed from between the undergrowth, was intersected by tiny streams, and was considered, in consequence, too damp for a playground.

Adjoining these was Bluebell Wood, situated on the summit of the steep 'Farm Road,' bordering a plateau so high that it overlooked miles and miles of country. On fine days one could even see the Wicklow Hills, though our home was situated in the Queen's County.

One entered Bluebell Wood by means of a rough stile; one followed a winding path which zig-zagged among tall firs, and then one came to the wood proper. In the spring a very sea of bluebells stretched away among the tree-trunks as far as eye could reach. The air was full of their fragrance. It was impossible to walk without crushing the juicy, waxen blooms at every step. There were all sorts of fascinating little clearings in this wood—mossy banks topped with elder or hazel bushes—patches of bracken through which we had to wade—big trees with wide-spreading roots, and cushions of moss in between; in one place a group of young, slender birches, with delicate leaves all a-quiver; in another a row of sturdy, weather-beaten beeches, their great, curved limbs growing close enough to the ground to enable us to climb and swing on them.

Once we built nests for ourselves in the forked branches of these beeches, and conveyed a quantity of straw thither on the backs of our pony and donkey. Very queer we must have looked perched thus in a row—each snugly ensconced in her own oddly-manufactured nest.

We built a stable for the pony and the donkey in Bluebell Wood. It was made of wattled hazel-wands, and thatched with bracken, and would have been very successful only that it was a little too small for the pony. As we could not reach very high, we were obliged to content ourselves with the structure as it stood, so we tied the pony up outside and all went well, except when he jerked his head or kicked, whereupon the walls collapsed.

However, the great point was the possession of a stable. It sounded so business-like to say: 'I am going to put up Tiny in the stable,' and when we had taken off Tiny's saddle and tied him by the bridle to a neighbouring branch, and given him plenty of young bracken to eat, we felt very grand indeed. Tiny would not eat bracken, but that was an unimportant detail, and he made himself very happy by nibbling all the leaves within reach, and occasionally, as has already been said, knocking down the stable.

When we tired of sitting in our nests, we inaugurated another kind of play, which amused us for months together. Living in the country as we did, we had very few friends; but it chanced that

a schoolmate of my mother's, dear Ellen P——, had children of about our age. On one memorable occasion Gertie had visited them, and she and I immediately struck up a friendship with two of the girls. The little ones, not to be behindhand, chose mates for themselves from among the younger members of that family. We conducted, indeed, a correspondence with these little girls for many years before we actually met.

In the opposite direction, at the other side of the park, was another wood of such ethereal, exquisite loveliness—or so it seemed to us in those days—that we called it 'Paradise.' We were very seldom allowed to go there, possibly because it was so far away, and bounded, moreover, by a deep and muddy ditch; but, once within its precincts, what beauty, mystery, and charm!

Numberless delicate wild growths flourished there—a little stream wound between undulating mossy banks: now and then the interlacing branches overhead were so dense that they made a kind of semi-darkness. We felt awe-struck in the midst of our delight; a sort of romantic delicious fear came upon us when we entered that wood. There were so many rustlings, and stealthy sounds, and a curious spicy fragrance—the very savour of the earth, and yet it seemed to us unearthly.

But all at once our Eden was laid waste for us—I shall never forget in what manner.

It was a very hot August day. They had been

haymaking in a meadow adjoining 'Paradise,' and, according to Irish custom, the hay had been piled in solid golden 'tramcocks,' tightly secured with twisted hay-rope.

English children know nothing of the delights of scampering across a big field, swinging oneself up on these tall hay-cocks, upheld by the rope, while one's feet slip and slide for some time on the smooth surface before they can find rest. But this feat is soon accomplished. The toe of a sturdy shoe eventually penetrates; the Irish child swarms up by the ropes, pauses a moment to prance in ecstacy on the summit, and rolls over on the other side. Then the child picks itself up and careers to the next cock, and when it is quite tired, sits on the shady side or lies flat on the top with the breeze ruffling its hair.

Well, we had enjoyed just such a scamper, and had, moreover, been allowed as a great treat to have tea in the hayfield. Our milk and bread and butter tasted perfectly delicious in the open air; and a basket of cherries had been added—great, red, rich cherries, so big that it needed no affectation to induce us to make two mouthfuls of each, and juicy to the last degree.

Nellie and I, sitting cross-legged on the top of a high haycock, were thoroughly enjoying ourselves. Tired out with play, however, a certain dreamy, happy silence presently fell upon us. There was not a bird singing that August afternoon, and all

the land was very still. Looking round, we could see the wide field bathed in the afternoon light, the level shafts of which pierced through the living screen which shaded our 'Paradise,' striking here and there against the root of a fir-tree or the silver trunk of a beech.

The sky was blue, blue overhead, paling on the horizon to that wondrous green which so often preludes sunset. There, too, the glory was growing and brightening. Soon the west would be ablaze.

'Let's go for a ramble in Paradise,' said Nellie, and, sliding down from our throne, we made our way thither.

There were little flutterings of wings among the boughs and a pattering of light feet; and how fine those green aisles looked, irradiated with a deepening glow that was almost rose-coloured. The underside of the leaves positively glittered, the delicate tracery of the birch branchlets over our heads made a web of gold. We seemed to tread on gold as our feet sank into the soft moss.

Not one word did we speak as we wandered on, still clasping each other's hands, fearful of breaking the spell which surrounded us; our dazzled eyes peering a little fearfully from side to side.

All at once we paused and stood rooted to the ground—what was that in front of us? Here, in the very heart of this wondrous elfin-land, where we should by rights have stumbled on some fairy

bower, some beautiful vision—what was it we observed? Hanging by a cord from the stout overhanging limb of one of the trees, was the poor little bleached skeleton of a small dog. Some fragments of fur still clung to the bones, and round the neck was a collar which we recognised.

This, then, was what had become of Carlo, the gardener's dog, which had mysteriously disappeared the year before.

Poor, playful Carlo!—he had but one failing, an incurable habit of chasing sheep, in consequence of which the authorities had decided that he was to be given away. His master had doubtless considered it less trouble to hang him, but the fact had been previously concealed from us.

It would be impossible to convey an idea of the impression produced on us by this discovery. We stood for a moment rooted to the ground, and then, without a word, turned and fled.

It was a long time before we could bring ourselves to allude to the subject, even to each other; but never again did we return to this Eden of our childhood. No fiery sword was needed to guard the entrance to it; it was enough to know that, far in the heart of the wood, poor Carlo's little bones rattled in the wind.

Like most children, we enjoyed a picnic above all things, and, although the picnic above alluded to ended disastrously, others were carried through with the utmost success.

One in particular stands out in my memory. It had been a subject of much discussion. It had been suggested that we should ride to a certain hill—the most prominent object in our landscape—but the difficulty of carrying the luncheon baskets to the summit caused the idea to be abandoned.

We next proposed to hold the festive gathering in one of the dells at the further end of the park, but when the happy day approached, the weather was so threatening that it was not considered safe to venture so far.

'How would it be,' asked my mother with an exceedingly cheerful air, as though struck by a brilliant idea, 'if we had our picnic under the big chestnut tree?'

'What, just outside the house?' we cried.

'Yes,' she rejoined, still appearing delighted with the sudden inspiration. 'We shall have our picnic in such good time, and it will be easy for the servants to carry out the things.'

We children looked at each other doubtfully. The chestnut tree was at a stone's throw from the door, and the prospect of making our picnic under the range of our own nursery windows was not nearly so alluring as that of dining in the woods. Still, any kind of picnic was better than no picnic at all; and, besides, we felt it our duty to endeavour to seem as much enchanted as our mother.

Next day, alas, the weather was cold and showery. We kept running to the windows every

minute or two, and flattening our little noses against the glass. Would there be any picnic at all, we wondered? When our mother came to the nursery we awaited her decision anxiously. To our surprise she was still beaming and hopeful.

'Oh, yes, you shall have your picnic, children,' she said, smiling: 'not out of doors, no—think how horrid it would be to sit on the damp grass in this weather—no, you shall have a nice picnic *in the house*.'

We gazed at her even more blankly than on the previous day, but seeing that she appeared to look forward to the festivity as something very special indeed, we brightened up and told each other a picnic in the house must be something quite out of the common.

Shuzzey seemed to think it a capital idea, and so did the other nurses; as for Miss Larkin, she declared that nothing could be more enjoyable.

At half-past one, therefore, our usual dinner hour, down we sallied to the dining-room, and there we found the well-stored luncheon baskets awaiting us.

It was great fun unpacking them all, and having nothing but cold things to eat, and being obliged to unwrap the cakes and tarts from neat white papers. We really were very merry over it, though now and then one of us would steal an inquiring glance at the others, and look very hard at our

mother to see if she *really* thought the entertainment quite as amusing as a picnic out-of-doors.

It was not, however, until we were tucked up that night in our little beds that Gertie put into words the thought that had been lurking in our minds all that day.

'Mollie,' said Gertie solemnly, through the darkness, 'that wasn't a picnic at all; it was simply a cold dinner.'

CHAPTER VIII

RED-LETTER DAYS

On my eighth birthday I was allowed to ride our pony for the first time. Tiny was a recent arrival, and was a pretty creature, black, a little more than twelve hands high, with a glossy coat and clean limbs. His only drawback was the fact of his being 'touched in the wind,' but perhaps that was not really a drawback in our case, as he often ran away with us and would probably have run farther, if he had not been obliged to pull up for want of breath.

I had previously ridden a donkey; at first in very uncomfortable fashion, in what we called a 'box saddle'—really a Spanish saddle—with Gertie or Nellie balanced on the other side. I can distinctly remember the sensation of being nearly cut in two by the leather strap round my middle when Nellie was my companion, for she was considerably lighter than I, and, on the other hand, bumping my back with every movement of the animal when Gertie was on the other side. Then came riding on a little pad saddle, still on donkey back, which was much more interesting, but fairly

nervous work. We had two donkeys, one of whom the groom called 'the wicked ass.' This nearly made an end of Aggie once, by attempting to roll while she was on its back, firmly strapped into the single 'box saddle.' Its preliminary snuffing at the ground had been mistaken for an innocent wish to eat grass, and it had already lain down and rolled on to its side—luckily not the one over which the poor little helpless legs were dangling—before the child was rescued. After this 'the wicked ass' was ridden no more, until Baby grew of an age to bestride and conquer it.

Well, I was a proud girl when on my eighth birthday I stood on the steps of the portico dressed for the first time in the little grey riding-skirt and tight-fitting black jacket which Gertie usually wore. I held a riding-whip in my hand, a birthday present —it was white, with a violet glass knob on top, studded with little gilt stars.

Coss led round the pony, whose small black person was almost hidden beneath my mother's big saddle. Such a comfortable saddle that was! It possessed an enormous crupper, and a pommel to which you could comfortably cling. It had a slipper instead of a stirrup, which afforded an almost platform-like support to a small foot.

I duly placed my foot in Coss's linked hands, and after counting: 'One, two, and three!' was hoisted into the saddle, and gathered up my reins, which my mother showed me how to hold.

'Be sure you don't let go the leading-rein, Coss,' was her final injunction.

We went off, scrunching over the gravel. Coss making short quick strides in time to the pony's; we had a little canter across the grass under the lime trees and finally reached the entrance-gate. Coss lived at the lodge, and Mrs. Coss, and all the little Cosses came out to see Miss Mary on the pony. I held myself straight and Mrs. Coss declared I had an elegant seat. Her husband gave it as his opinion that I had a nice hand on the reins, and that I would make the best rider of them all yet.

We went out on the road, though it was very hot and dusty, drawbacks which I ignored in my satisfaction at seeing so much of the world. Round by the outside of the park wall we went for a little way, and then, leaving the shade of its plantations, turned to the left up the road which led to Ratheniska. I knew this road well, for we drove up and down it every Sunday, but it seemed to have a different aspect seen thus from the saddle. Coss was getting very warm; he pushed his hat to the back of his head, and slipped the loop of the leading-rein over his arm while he mopped his forehead.

'Do let me have a gallop, Coss,' I pleaded valorously, though I was secretly a little nervous.

'Is it up this hill?' protested Coss, 'and Tiny with his wind the way it is. Besides, it wouldn't

be right to gallop on the hard road. Sit up straight now, while we're going by the houses.'

We were passing a side track where, indeed, a little cluster of thatched cottages was nestling in the shelter of the hedge; a few ragged children were playing in the ditch, and a woman was rounding up a pig which had escaped from its sty. She dropped a curtsey, for she was one of those who often came up to the 'Coort,' as they called our house, to receive an alms from my mother.

I nodded back and said: 'Good morning, Mrs. Brophy,' and thought how the children must be envying me as they saw me ride by.

We made our way gingerly between the two pools which overflowed so large a share of the road further up, and Tiny seemed disposed to dance a little, and looked askance at the white ducks that were wallowing blissfully in the muddy water.

'Mind out, there,' said Coss sternly.

A large farmhouse stood a little back from the road just above these pools, and, as we approached it, Coss unfastened the leading-rein and put it in his pocket.

'Sure that pony's as quiet as a lamb,' he said; 'it 'ud be a shame for me to be holding on to the rein that way, and you such a big girl.'

The farmer was looking over his gate, and hailed us as we came up.

'Troth, that's an elegant little pony ye have there, James.'

'Aye, it is,' replied Coss, with an indifferent air. 'It just serves the children's turn.'

'Is that Miss Gertie ye have up there?'

'It is not,' rejoined Coss, 'it's Miss Mary. I wonder ye wouldn't know her. Sure, she's the only one that's like the mistress.'

'So she is,' agreed Farmer Drennan. 'Will ye step inside now, Miss Mary, till I get ye a few ginger-biscuits?'

'Oh no, thank ye; no, thank ye,' put in Coss, answering for me. 'Sure we have to be going off with ourselves home now. I'm just taking her up to the top here and then we'll have to turn round again.'

'Good bye, Mr. Drennan,' said I, 'and thank you all the same.'

We went on, the pony breaking into a gentle trot which enabled me to 'rise' in my saddle, after the most approved fashion. Coss kept pace with us, his hand hovering over the reins ready to check the pony if the pace increased. I did not turn my head, but felt that Mr. Drennan was looking after us.

At the top of the road we turned and repassed the farm, Tiny trotting as before, and poor Coss ambling beside him, perspiring profusely. When Mr. Drennan was out of sight we could not keep this up, but fell into a walk again, Coss mopping his brow as before, but in a high good humour.

'Faith, as I was telling herself, ye'll make the

best rider of the lot,' he said. 'Keep to the side now, miss, there's an ass-car coming.'

Carefully pulling the rein, I guided Tiny as desired, and we passed the donkey-cart in great style, exchanging remarks with its occupants. One old woman clasped her hands together, and declared I was a lovely sight, and it was in consequence with much elation that I turned Tiny in at the big gate, which little red-haired Maggie Coss was holding open. But 'pride goeth before a fall.' This was literally true in my case; for wicked Tiny, remembering the short cut which would bring him more speedily to his stable and his dinner, no sooner felt the grass beneath his feet than he broke into a gallop, soon distancing poor Coss. Across the park we went, my poor little person bumping hopelessly in the saddle, my weak little hands vainly endeavouring to pull the reins.

We passed safely under one big tree, but the low-hanging branches of the next caught me full in the chest, and sent me hurtling backwards while Tiny sped from beneath me. He checked himself, however, at a few yards' distance, and trotting back began to nibble the grass close to where I lay. He had always been a child's pony, and this habit of his proved very convenient on subsequent occasions, for—in spite of Coss's prophecy—I never became a good rider, and hardly ever went out without tumbling off. I seldom hurt myself, but this first memorable fall was a very painful one.

I felt as if my entire framework were composed of 'funny-bones,' every one of which had received a nasty jar. I was a good deal stunned, and my nose was bleeding profusely.

Coss declared that I cried out when he came up: 'Oh, Coss, I'm kilt!'

I had no consciousness of this, and always indignantly denied at least the phraseology. But he for his part averred that he had never been so much relieved in all his life as when he heard me announce my own destruction, for he had previously been sure it was a fact.

He lifted me up, felt me all over to make sure that none of my bones were broken, and then proceeded to wipe my tears, as well as the blood which trickled over my face and jacket, with handfuls of moss, which he scooped up from between the roots of the offending tree. The ground was rather moist after recent rain, and though his ministrations arrested both tears and bleeding, they increased the bedaubed appearance of both face and dress. He lifted me into the saddle with a sigh, and turned the pony's head homewards, carefully adjusting the leading-rein as he did so. We were all, except the pony, in extremely low spirits, but Tiny tossed up his head and jiggled along, rolling a mischievous eye, and being evidently quite ready to make off again.

'Look at here, now, Miss Mary,' said Coss, suddenly breaking silence after one of these upward

tosses of Tiny's head, 'that's what had ye out of the saddle. It was the pony tossing up his head that way, and you stooping forward that caught ye the crack in the face, that made ye tumble off. Ye can be tellin' the mistress that, and you can be lettin' on that I had a hoult of the leading-rein all the time.'

I looked round at Coss with shocked amazement.

'Oh, Coss,' I said, deeply scandalised, 'I couldn't say that to mamma.'

'An' why wouldn't ye?' rejoined Coss.

'Because it would be a lie,' I said firmly; 'and I *couldn't* tell a lie.'

'Your mamma will not be lettin' you ride the pony again, then,' grumbled the coachman, 'an' ye'll be gettin' me into trouble, what's more. An' me after lettin' you go out on the road an' everything. Sure, what harm would it be to say that much? The pony might aisy have given you a crack on the head.'

But I was proof against this specious reasoning.

'No, Coss,' I said. 'I won't tell a lie.'

'Well, that's all the thanks I get,' said Coss, and relapsed into silence.

I must own I felt something of a heroine, though my heart was torn with regret at my inability to oblige Coss, in whose eyes I particularly desired to stand well, and whose imputation of ingratitude I found hard to bear. However, when, having decided to make the best of a bad job, he confessed

the truth to my mother, he contrived to make me seem a partaker in his guilt.

'Miss Mary wanted to ride on the road so she did. . . . Miss Mary thought bad of goin' past people with the leadin'-rein on.'

Though these were exaggerations I could not deny the fact that I had allowed the leading-rein to be removed without protest, though I had heard my mother's parting injunction. Had it not been for the very doleful appearance I presented, with my blood-stained, earth-smeared face, coupled with the fact that it was my birthday, I should have received as severe a reprimand as Coss. As it was I got off with a slight scolding, and went upstairs with a good deal of elation, to report my thrilling adventures to the others, and to enjoy the sensation caused by my aspect.

I am glad to say that Coss did not bear malice. Many delightful riding-lessons did we subsequently receive from him, though after my escapade my mother stipulated that these should take place within view of the library windows. The leading-rein was, however, with her permission soon discarded, and Gertie and I learnt to trot and canter without accident on her part, and with frequent, though harmless, falls on mine.

What we liked better than these riding-lessons was going out in an informal way, just in our ordinary frocks, without riding skirts, or any groom in attendance, though our governess, of course,

accompanied us. Gertie and I would mount Tiny by turns while the younger ones rode 'the good donkey,' Cadichon.* We would lead our steeds to a convenient stile or wall and there mount or dismount, as the case might be. The starched white frocks of nursery days were now replaced by very voluminous print or stuff dresses, under which, except when out riding, Gertie and I wore little crinolines.

How absurd it seems now to think of little girls of eight and ten wearing crinolines! But I assure you we thought ourselves most comical-looking when we discarded our 'hoops' as we called them.

We used to go for long expeditions on summer afternoons—to Dysart Hill, which formed the central point of our view, and Dunnamace, the ruins of a wonderful old castle supposed to be originally built by Strongbow. We would tie up the animals to a gate at the foot of the hill on which these ruins stood, and go climbing up the steep furze-grown, rock-strewn sides of it to the old keep on the summit. There was a banqueting hall, with a huge stone table in the centre; the remains of a portcullis; a winding stairway, set in the thickness of the wall—and oh, what thick walls those were! and a small, nearly perfect upper chamber, through the loop-holed windows of which a view could be had of what had been the drawbridge.

* So named in honour of the hero of Mme. de Ségur's delightful *Histoire d'un Âne.*

We used to go about these precincts cautiously, often calling to each other and pointing out the slits in the masonry, where, as rumour had it, boiling lead used to be poured down on intruders. The only intruders now were the wildflowers and ferns that found root-hold here and there, and the goats that nibbled the short sweet grass, within and without the old walls.

Perhaps the most memorable of all these excursions took place one day in early autumn when my mother accompanied us. She had previously despatched one of us with a message to Miss Canning, the governess next but one to Miss Larkin, with a polite request for a half-holiday.

To the great surprise and dudgeon of the envoy the reply was in the negative. We were rather behindhand with our lessons, and Miss Canning did not think we could have another half-holiday for some time. My mother received the announcement with surprise, and saying that she thought there must be some mistake, went rustling off to the schoolroom to see the governess herself. We children were told to run away, and waited anxiously outside until my mother presently emerged smiling, and unconsciously looking a little triumphant. There *had* been a mistake, she said. Miss Canning hadn't quite understood what a special occasion this was, and, of course, we must make up for it by being extremely studious for the rest of the week.

We promised, and ran joyfully away to get ready, being perfectly aware that the rectifying of the mistake had been due to a little judicious pressure from my mother.

'Of course,' said quick-witted Gertie, 'Mamma only *asks* for a half-holiday out of civility. She knows perfectly well that she can give us one any time she likes.'

But we were too discreet to pretend to be aware of this either to our mother or to Miss Canning, though there was a certain temptation to crow a little in the latter case, for she had never succeeded in gaining our affections.

My mother had been a great rider in her youth, but had given up that form of exercise since my father's death. Her beautiful horse, Sir Richard, had been sold, and her habit cut down to fit Gertie.

As this expedition was to be a lengthy one, too far for her to walk, she decided to ride the farm pony, a useful animal, which fetched the post every day, took us to and from church on Sunday, and did a little carting during any odd time. He was a stout and really rather nice-looking bay cob, about fourteen hands high, and we thought he presented a noble appearance when my dear mother mounted him. She wore for the occasion a flowing black grenadine skirt, for it was a warm afternoon, and the loose black silk jacket and shady hat which was her ordinary outdoor apparel. We did not think there was anything at all incongruous in this

costume, and looked admiringly at her as she led the way, sitting very straight, her face, which was soft and fair to the end of her life, now becomingly flushed, and her blue-grey eyes very bright under the brim of her hat.

Gertie and Nellie had the first turns, to which they were entitled, on Tiny and Cadichon, and Aggie and I scampered behind, flourishing switches and prancing in imitation of the animals.

The steward and the herd accompanied us, for the expedition was undertaken for the purpose of inspecting some young stock at a distant part of the property. Up the farm road went the cavalcade, past the cow-yard and the ' haggard,' as the stack-yard is called in Ireland. On one of the big gate-posts of this haggard I used to perch sometimes, ' gobbling ' at the turkeys which roamed about the yard, until their faces grew absolutely blue with rage. But I had no time for that to-day. Cadichon's tail was already disappearing round the angle of the bank; our mamma's figure was lost to sight behind the hedge which surmounted it.

We found that the riders had called a halt, however, at the next turn of the lane, by a gate which led to a large field which we called the ' cow-park.' The milch cows and heifers were to be seen grazing here, and Johnny Green, the herd, had a good deal to say about several of them. Tiny and Cadichon fidgeted, so we young folks were allowed to proceed slowly along the ever-mounting lane,

which was now all grass and moss-grown, with only a tiny little stony track in the middle. There were the loveliest, wildest hedges on either side, and little cushioned banks of moss, where wild strawberries grew in summer, and tiny ferns, and all sorts of aromatic plants. At last my mother rejoined us, and we went on, ever climbing higher, till the track abruptly ended at an iron gate set in a stone wall, which gave access to the deer park.

Oh, the lovely view from that place! The blue distant hills stretching one behind the other, the green slope falling away beneath our feet on the left, to the hollow where the young horses were grazing.

A favourite mare of my father's, called Lambertina, had the freedom of this place, and had there reared a large and promising family; from a safe distance at the other side of the fence we used to love to watch her galloping round this pasture, followed by her progeny in various stages of development.

The wild character of the undulating land which we were now to traverse grew wilder and ever more rugged as we rounded the fir wood crowning the hilltop.

We had changed places with Gertie and Nellie at the wall, and I was now my mother's proud companion—proud, but a little nervous too, for Tiny was excited by the presence of the farm pony, and would sidle inconveniently close to him. I felt still

more alarmed when we presently found ourselves surrounded by the young stock, whose wellbeing my mother had come to ascertain. They were nearly all yearlings — shaggy, savage little creatures, one and all much startled by our appearance.

There was a great deal of lowing, and stamping of forefeet, followed by rushes away from us, with lowered heads and erect tails. When this happened the steward or the herd would round them up again, and Tiny would jiggle, and make a little pretence of rearing, while Cadichon, who was a sociable animal, would evince a desire to make a closer acquaintance with these strange little beasts. But my mother was bent on discussing them at leisure, and so were the black-bearded Mr. Lowry and grey-whiskered Johnny Green.

We were all beginning to feel rather tired, as well as nervous, when we heard our mother say: 'Well, I suppose that's all—we may as well go home again, now.'

'They're burnin' the furze over beyant this evenin',' observed Green. 'I daresay the young ladies would like to see it. The boys hereabouts is going to make a grand bonfire.' He pronounced it *bone*fire.

'Do you want to see the furze burning, children?' asked my mother.

Didn't we! We cheered and clapped our hands.

'But it must be getting near tea-time,' resumed

she. 'I suppose they'll wait until it's nearly dark to make the bonfire.'

'Well, if ye don't think bad of steppin' in for a bit to our little place,' suggested Green; 'you could rest yourself there, and herself 'ud be over-j'yed to see ye—she was sayin' this mornin' it was a len'th o' time sence she had a sight o' yourself or the young ladies. She has a nice drop o' new milk in the house, and I know she's makin' griddle cakes.'

'Well, all that sounds very inviting,' said my mother graciously, 'and I should like to see Mrs. Green. Thank you, Green, I think we shall all enjoy it very much.'

Mr. Lowry turned homewards, to our relief. He was rather a superior gentleman and we much disliked his black beard. We set forward at a foot's pace, Johnny Green strolling between the two ponies, according to his custom, and conversing with my mother.

I remember her questioning him once about a certain old Mrs. Fitzpatrick, his neighbour, who had been at one time a regular pensioner of hers, hobbling down frequently for 'a grain of tay,' or 'a sup of broth,' and occasionally for 'a drop of turpentine,' which she took internally and seemed to find extremely comforting.

'Och, she's there yet,' said Green. 'She doesn't get out of her bed now, but there's not a sign o' dyin' on her.'

'She must be an immense age,' remarked my mother.

'She is that,' philosophically agreed Green. 'Going on two hundred, so she is. Troth, she'll have to be shot.'

We thought this a somewhat sinister joke, but my mother appeared to enjoy it. Green himself had not moved a muscle of his countenance.

The thatched cottage in which Mrs. Green lived was situated at the other side of the fir wood, on the edge of a waste of furze-grown land, where geese and a few cows pastured. There was a turf-stack on the right, and a small haystack on the left —for Mrs. Green had a cow of her own.

Mrs. Green was looking over the half-door, apparently on the look-out for us. She was a tall, very clean woman, many years older than her husband, and a great friend of ours. Her little house with its earthen floor was always beautifully clean and neat, and on this occasion it was more spick-and-span than usual, for though, as she explained, she hardly expected us to come, she had evidently made special preparations. We dismounted, leaving the ponies in Green's charge while we ran joyfully in. I can see that kitchen now, with its whitewashed walls and its glowing turf fire, built on the hearthstone itself, no grate being ever used in these Irish cabins at that time, or indeed I think now. A griddle, or gridiron, was poised on the hot embers, on which a flat cake was

browning. There was a large tub of water just inside the door—beautiful spring water Mrs. Green said it was, and it was usually a treat for us to scoop up some of this in a little pink-and-white mug of Mrs. Green's, and to declare it was perfectly delicious.

But this evening something special was in store for us. A brown teapot was keeping warm by the hearth; the well-scrubbed deal table was spread with a clean cloth of blue and white check; a large milk-jug of blue and white crockery, rings of either colour decorating its surface alternately, was in the centre, filled with milk still warm from the cow, while a bowl of the same pattern was piled with moist, or, as we called it, 'soft' sugar.

'If ye'll sit down, my lady,' said Mrs. Green, pushing forward one of the chairs—Mrs. Green always gave my mother brevet rank, 'I'll give ye a cup o' tay in a minute. By the greatest good luck I have it ready.'

Her old face was flushed with triumph as she set the teapot on a little wooden platter on the table. The contents had probably been stewing most of the afternoon, and my mother could never take strong tea at the best of times, so she checked Mrs. Green's liberality when about a tablespoonful of the inky fluid had covered the bottom of her cup.

'Please fill it up with hot water, Mrs. Green,'

she petitioned. 'I sleep so badly I'm obliged to drink very weak tea.'

Mrs. Green went rather mournfully off to fetch the kettle, which was suspended by a hook over the fire.

'Sure that little drop won't do you a ha'porth o' good,' she protested.

'May *we* have tea, mamma?' we murmured. '*Do* let us have some of Mrs. Green's tea.'

All the usual prohibitions were apparently to be relaxed on that blissful afternoon, for my mother, urged perhaps by the somewhat crestfallen expression on Mrs. Green's face, gave the requisite permission, only stipulating that we were to take a good deal of milk. So we drank Mrs. Green's tea, made thick with the rich milk, and syrupy by plentiful portions of brown sugar, out of Mrs. Green's cups, which were little shiny 'goldy' ones, as we called them—really a sort of imitation lustre, I suppose—with blue belts round their middles. Then Mrs. Green removed the cake from the gridiron. It was done to a turn, she said.

Such a cake! Made of flour and buttermilk, very white within and beautifully brown without, and moreover sweetened and mixed with carraway seeds.

'Yes, I put a few care-aways through it,' said Mrs. Green bashfully. 'Himself does be fancyin' them.'

She carried out a wedge of this cake and a cup

of tea to 'himself,' after our needs had been provided for.

Never in all my life have I tasted anything so delicious as that hot griddle cake, buttered while still steaming, and in our case sprinkled with brown sugar.

We were hungry after the hours spent in the keen air, and this meal seemed almost romantically strange, partaken of as it was in the gathering dusk, with the firelight winking on Mrs. Green's pots and pans and cups and saucers, while we looked out on the dark pine wood, the spicy scent of which came in over the half-door to mix with the smell of the smouldering turf—then the consciousness of being out so late in my mother's beloved company, the prospect of the 'bonefire,' it was almost like an adventure out of a fairy book! I don't think I have ever been so entirely happy before or since.

Presently Johnny Green poked his head in through the door.

'The lads is gone up to the bonefire now,' he announced. 'I seen a lot of them running up beyant.'

'We must be moving, then,' said my mother.

After many farewells and thanks to Mrs. Green, we set out, and as by this time it was Gertie's turn to ride again, my spirits rose still higher. On we went, round by the fir wood which now looked very dark and mysterious, though here and there a branch or a tree-trunk caught the rays of the

sinking sun. The thick, short grass was covered with dew, cool to one's feet and sweet to one's nostrils, and the scent of larches and firs and gorse mingled with the smell of damp earth and ground ivy and all the other little woodland things that one could fancy stretching out thirsty leaves for refreshment. The hilltop grasses glowed in the light of the sunset, and the flower of the gorse looked like flames, and even every rough hair on the ponies' backs seemed to have its own little nimbus. Our own faces were funny and pinky, and Gertie's and Nellie's hair glittered like gold.

Suddenly, however, a brighter glow caught our eyes. A sheet of flame leaping upwards from the rising ground in front of us. The pungent smell and crackling sound were equally delightful to us, and as we came nearer and saw the fire break out in ever-fresh places, and the figures of half a score of men and boys running and leaping round it, we grew more and more excited. The ponies, snorting a little, were pulled up, Johnny Green putting a hand on the rein of each, while Cadichon, who was not, apparently, much interested, browsed at ease in spite of Nellie's indignant jerks at the reins. Now the tongue of flame in the centre seemed to grow higher and higher, occasionally dying down as a dark bundle was thrown on it, and then leaping upwards like a live thing with a sound that was almost a roar. Then this was the bonfire! We could almost feel the heat of it where we stood,

and were infected by the enthusiasm of the shouting boys who danced round it, ever piling on the fuel. We watched until our eyes were dazzled; we shouted until we were hoarse, and tore ourselves away with keen regret when my mother said it was time to go!

How strange it was to turn away from that vivid scene to find such a shadowy world awaiting us. We seemed to leave even the last glories of the sunset behind us as we came down the hill, feeling gropingly for the latch of the gate, ready to start when, as we passed close to the lower deer-park, we could hear the distant scuffling and snorts of Lambertina and her family. Now there would be a squeal and a scamper, and I feared in my cowardly little soul that one of the colts would jump over the paling and come clattering after us with wild flourishes of shaggy legs and the baring, perhaps, of wicked teeth. I had seen Lambertina bare her teeth once, and was told that when in such moods she was dangerous.

But here was Bluebell Wood, with all its trees whispering together as it seemed, and yonder, over the hedge at the opposite site, we could see the dim fields stretching away and the trees standing up very tall and dark, and the distant woods and hills melting together, and only showing faintly against a dusky sky where the afterglow just glimmered. My mother rode ahead, next came Tiny and Cadichon, led by Green, while Nellie

and I followed hand-in-hand—Aggie, on account of her short legs, being given an extra turn on the donkey.

It was such a hushed mysterious hour that we didn't talk much, but we uttered little squeals of laughter when we wandered from the path, as often happened, and we found ourselves tripping over a mossy hillock or almost falling into the hedge.

But though we were silent and perhaps a little tired, we were none the less happy. I asked Nellie if this wasn't lovely, and Nellie, who was a very imaginative child, whispered back that it was like Fairyland, but we both spoke low so as not to break the spell.

However, it was good to turn into the yard, and see Coss's lantern shining in the window of the harness-room, whence he emerged, rather cross, and not a little anxious, to help the riders to alight.

'I thought it was lost out-and-out you were,' he explained. Then, in a severe undertone to Johnny Green: 'Ye hadn't a right to be keeping the mistress out so late as this—them little bits o' childer ought to be in their beds by now.'

Little bits of children indeed! After such an experience as this we felt ourselves almost grown up.

And then the joy of coming in by the back way and seeing so many of the windows on that side of the house lit up, and a candle burning in Miss Canning's room, the blind of which was not drawn.

We wondered how she had got on during our absence. There was Macky, peeping out of the kitchen door, and saying she was afraid the mistress's dinner would be ruined—was it as late as that!—while William, hovering at a respectful distance because he was in shirt sleeves, remarked that he had been wondering whether he oughtn't to be coming to look for us.

With what gleeful pride did we not pound up the back stairs to pour forth our adventures to Mobie, and how nice it was to find four little bowls of hot bread and milk waiting by the nursery fire. Mobie said it hadn't seemed worth while to let us go tramping down to the schoolroom when it was so late.

We approved of her forethought, particularly as we felt that Miss Canning's presence would have a distinctly damping effect. We heard her sally forth from her room presently, but to our relief the heavy tread did not pause at the nursery door. We sat as still as mice until she went past, and then our joyous babble burst forth again. Our perfect day remained unspoilt.

CHAPTER IX

BIRTHDAY PRESENTS AND OTHERS

THERE was no regular celebration of birthdays in our family, though now and then we received a present or were allowed a 'treat.'

When I was five years old someone gave me a tiny, oblong, leather-covered pocket-book, fastened with an elastic band, and furnished with a pencil with an insecure metal tip. This pocket-book contained my first literary achievement, written in letters about an inch long, all of which had a tendency to run downhill, as the tiny pages were not ruled. I can see those pages now, and distinctly recall the appearance presented by the legend set down by my infant hand. I wrote:

I AM FI
VE YEARS
OLD TO-DAY
WE HAD
A PICN
IC I SAW
A COW WI
TH NO HORNS
MAMMA SAID IT WAS
A MELE COW.

Here the effort ended, either because I lost the top of my pencil or because I found I was using up the pages of my little book too rapidly. I may state that I have not the faintest idea what a 'mele cow' is, or if there be such a beast.*

I think we were allowed a half-holiday on birthdays, as the famous ride during which Coss's procedure so much scandalised me took place on the day when I was eight years old; but I do not remember any ordering of one's own dinner, or cutting of a candle-surrounded and much-sugared cake, both of which items enter largely into a latter-day child's birthday celebration.

Baby was the exception in our family, being entitled to certain privileges on account of being the youngest. He was also lucky in possessing a very generous godfather who sent him the most beautiful present each year.

On his second birthday he was given a toy horse —not a rocking-horse, but quite as big. It was mounted on a wheeled platform which could be pulled about, and was covered with a real pony-skin, which we all delighted in grooming. It had a saddle and bridle which could be taken on and off, while the bit and stirrups could be removed and polished at will. Baby had a regiment of willing

*I am now told that the word signifies 'hornless' in the vernacular.

In Scotland and North of Ireland this word is pronounced and spelt 'moylie' or 'moily.' See Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary. Derivation probably Erse 'maol.'

ostlers eager to perform services which he was too small to accomplish for himself; but he used to climb into the saddle, and, when the stirrups were adjusted to the length of his sturdy legs, sit proudly erect, clutching the reins while we dragged his steed up and down the long nursery corridor, two of us pulling the handle in front and two pushing behind.

Other curious toys came his way, fashioned from the most unlikely materials, by the black servant who succeeded William. George was a Senegalese, quite unlike the ordinary negro in appearance, being tall and slender, with a small head and quite passably good features; but no Virginian 'darkie' could have been blacker. He spoke very correct English, and was a rather stately personage, evoking in us a kind of fearful admiration. Our fear was tempered by the fact that he had a white wife and four very pretty brown children, two of whom were blue-eyed like their mother. Our admiration increased when we discovered that there was hardly anything which George could not do, from mending a watch to repairing and even making toys.

He presented Baby with, amongst other contrivances, a stuffed rabbit, seated in a little cart in front of which was placed a small drum. Its forepaws were jointed in some marvellous way, and provided with drumsticks; when the cart was pulled along, the rabbit beat a vigorous tattoo in time to the revolving wheels. He also concocted a musical

instrument with strings of catgut, from which a doll produced weird sounds by means of bristles doing duty as hands.

I remember another toy which my mother brought Baby from Dublin—a cart containing a grotesque little man with a white wig, who, when the cart was pulled along, rose solemnly from his seat and bowed right and left.

Children soon tire of mechanical toys, however. What we really liked best were cheap imitations of everyday objects. Penny churns, the dashers of which we vigorously plied in the expectation of producing butter. Could Macky have been induced to provide us with a little cream, some result might have been obtained, but milk was considered quite good enough for us to mess about with, and so, though we churned and churned, nothing happened, except that a strong flavour of wood was imparted to the milk, and a horribly sour smell clave to the churn for many days, for we were naturally unable to scald it. Once, however, for a brief moment we thought we had achieved success.

'Come here, come here!' cried Gertie. 'There *is* butter in my churn! I've made butter at last!'

We pressed round her, full of enthusiasm, as, having removed the upper portion of the churn, she displayed a most unmistakable piece of butter floating in the milk. But alas! the nursery-maid's smothered laughter revealed the fraud, and our

exultation changed into fury at having been taken in.

Penny paint-boxes, containing colours which could seldom be induced to come off on the brush, were another joy; also papier-maché birds, with heads that could be turned in a life-like manner to one side or the other. We used to put these in empty birdcages, where they looked so natural that we expected our own Dickies to be deceived. But after their inquiring shrieks had remained unanswered, our birds took no further notice of these spurious fowl.

We liked little mangles, and dust-pans, and kitchen utensils of all kinds, though the latter generally came to an untimely end by melting away when placed on the top bar of the nursery grate. But I can recall a little copper kettle which survived this test, and from the minute spout of which real steam would come when the teaspoonful of water it contained was 'on the boil.'

We had a doll's house of our own, made, under my mother's directions, by Mr. Buggy, and handsomely painted without in imitation of dashed plaster, while the rooms within were suitably papered. The furnishing of this mansion and the dressing of the inhabitants was a source of great interest and amusement to us for a time. Nowhere, perhaps, are the laws of caste so strictly observed as among the dwellers in a doll's house. The mistress of the establishment and her children were

little china dolls with slim figures and well-shaped hands and feet, while the servants belonged to the description known as 'ha'penny Dutch,' and were not so assertive as to have noses, or even to lay claim to more than apologies for feet. These we dressed in neat prints and aprons, their caps being affixed to their round black heads with uncompromising tin-tacks. But our appreciation of the dolls' house was short-lived, partly because our practical minds could never be quite reconciled to the fact that it was necessary to remove the whole front of the house before we could play with it, and that there was no staircase, but chiefly because Baby discovered that he could sit, in a doubled-up condition, in the large drawing-room, and when the house was closed, peer at us through the windows! His nurse frequently indulged this fancy of his, and as there was not room for Baby *and* the furniture, by the time he had knelt on the grand piano and crushed sofas and armchairs beneath the rest of his little person, the wreckage was rather extensive.

Dolls were what Gertie and I really loved best: the younger ones liked them too, and played with them in a desultory fashion, but without lavishing on them the same whole-hearted and really maternal affection which we elders bestowed on ours. We should have felt miserable if we did not put our children to bed every night and 'get them up' in the morning. There was a row of dolls' beds

and cradles in one special corner of the schoolroom, though, as our family increased, we were obliged to use cardboard boxes and even upturned footstools as bedsteads. An old-fashioned square footstool, with gilt or carved legs, made, when turned upside down, rather a fine miniature four-poster.

One of our trials was the fact that some of our dolls were bought ready dressed, and that their clothes, in consequence, would not 'put on' and 'take off.' We endeavoured to rectify this defect whenever it was possible, but I remember being sorely distressed about one particularly charming little shepherd boy who not only held a crook in his hand, but had a hat firmly fastened to—in fact forming part of—his head. After a certain amount of careful waggling, the crook was detached, but the hat could not be dealt with; nevertheless, feeling it would be cruel not to put the poor little fellow to bed with the rest, I had recourse to all sorts of expedients to disguise the ignominious fact that he slept in his hat. Sometimes I pretended he had toothache and tied up his head as a remedy; and sometimes I would negligently dispose a shawl at such a cunning angle that it hid the hat while suffering the pretty pink and white face to be seen. Dickens knew the child mind well when he made 'the Marchioness' say: 'If you make-believe hard enough it's all right.'

When our mother went to Dublin she would ask

us occasionally what we should like her to bring back for us, and Gertie and I nearly always said: 'A doll!' I know I did.

'A doll again,' she commented impatiently once. 'Why do you want so many dolls, children? You must break a great many.'

Numbers of dolls were broken, no doubt, and sundry others were discarded when, for some reason or another, they lost their power to persuade us that they were real children. Dolls in those days were often made of a kind of composition—papier-maché underneath, with a rather thin layer of wax on top. In course of time the papier-maché began to show through, particularly about the nose: who could love a child with a brown papier-maché nose? And sometimes the wax surface got so shiny from exposure to the sun, or as the result of much kissing, that it was impossible to believe it resembled flesh. Moreover, Gertie and I always lived in hopes that the newest gift would prove to be the ideal of which we were in search. We were, however, frequently doomed to disappointment. When, for instance, the profusion of hair, black or flaxen, which covered the head of some new treasure proved to be made of tow, we felt that she could not be our dream. But when the roots were firmly held in a cleft in the middle of the skull, our hearts sank indeed. This split was fatal to imagination, though if the doll had a pretty face we endeavoured to forget it.

Once, when Gertie was about eleven, my mother took her to far-away England on a visit to the schoolfellow of her youth, 'Ellen,' beloved alike by us of the new generation as by her comrade of the old, though until then none of us knew her, except by my mother's description and her own charming letters.

Gertie mightily enjoyed herself among the sixteen children of that family, who were in turn much attracted by her own quaint, bright personality. But during her stay they not only fraternised but squabbled, which is perhaps the best test of friendship.

One evening a discussion arose as to the respective merits of the white muslin frocks which all the little girls had donned for the evening. Ellen's children pointed out that there were more tucks in their skirts than in Gertie's; but Gertie, though nonplussed for a moment by the undeniable fact, speedily asserted herself.

'Oh,' she exclaimed triumphantly, 'but *my* frock is made with a sewing-machine!'

Autres temps, autres mœurs! Sewing-machines were then just beginning to be used.

On their return from this momentous journey, four dolls were unpacked, purchased by my mother in London, with Gertie's active co-operation. Two of them were the most enormous dolls I have ever seen, and were chosen by Gertie for herself and me on this account. The fact that they had wax hair

and kid arms somewhat detracted from my rapture; still, as Gertie pointed out, the size was everything. When you walked about with such a solid armful you really felt as if you *were* carrying a child; and, moreover, the long sawdust-stuffed legs were big enough to be clad in real shoes and stockings.

My mother had made her own selection in the case of our juniors. Nellie was given an exquisite little French *poupée*, with flaxen hair braided in two plaits, and Aggie a baby doll.

How we enjoyed the shopping expedition to Maryborough to buy the material for these dolls' clothes—real flannel and nainsook and halfpenny lace for their underclothes, real baby's strap-shoes and a material known as 'llama' for their frocks. I chose pink of a shade which Mrs. Daly called 'saucer-ferine' (meaning, I suppose, 'Solferino'), while Gertie had blue of a correspondingly violent hue. Mrs. Daly made these frocks on the same principle that she made ours, and we achieved the underclothes with a certain amount of help. My mother was much pleased with the result, and gave us two oblong boxes, which had been made for a travelling carriage inherited from her father, to hold them and their clothes. They were much too big to fit in any cradles, and we used to arrange their garments in neat piles at the bottom of these boxes, cover them with blankets and sheets and put the dollies to bed on top, being careful to leave the lids of the boxes open that the children might have

plenty of air. But somehow or other, whether because the dolls were so big and so heavy, or because their hard blue and black eyes would not shut, or because of the wax hair, we never really loved them, and they were often left reposing in their boxes, while we played with older and lighter favourites.

Gertie and I felt, however, that the ideal *had* been reached when, after one of her periodical visits to Dublin, my mother brought us each a baby doll. These were fashioned on a new model, and had real chubby baby bodies and bald heads with just a little indication of hair. Moreover, two strings hung from small holes at their waists, which, on being pulled, caused them to say 'Mam-ma' and 'Pap-pa.'

Some uncomprehending grown-up was unkind enough to mar our first ecstacy by pointing out that infants who were so young as to have no teeth—for indeed one of the charms of these incomparable dolls consisted in the fact that the parted lips displayed little red gums and not the conventional couple of unnaturally perfect teeth—and practically no hair, would not be able to speak. We soon got over this difficulty, however, for we discovered that, on pulling the strings successively and very slowly, a sort of bleating, long-drawn wail was emitted by our babies, which did indeed resemble the real thing. We were bidden to dress these dolls ourselves, and I remember taking immense pains with

the underclothing; the little open shirt, the flannel binder and barrow which had to be herring-boned —Gertie in particular found this last procedure difficult—and the long white petticoat, with its tiny tucks and sleeveless bodice. But before my layette was complete an event occurred which, for the time being, put dolls and everything else out of our heads. This was the very serious, in fact extremely dangerous, illness of Aggie.

That year the Christmas cake, of which hitherto we had seemed to partake with impunity, proved to be too much for her, and brought on an attack of acute internal inflammation. She was removed from the nursery, and we were not allowed to go near her, but could hear her moaning and sometimes raving in delirium. Once I heard the poor mite say in her old-fashioned way: 'If your hand be cool, Mobie, you may lay it on my brow.'

It seemed that we had never known before how dearly we loved this little sister, whose imperious ways we had been wont to resent, and whom we had teased when she cried, as she occasionally did, for what seemed to be hours at a time. She was a sensitive child and, moreover, a prey to all sorts of vague alarms. We used to tell her she would have furrows down her cheeks like St. Peter, and she would respond: 'How can you say such a thing when you know it always makes me cry!'

Her weeping was sometimes of a most methodical description, and it was related of her that once,

when giving way to her feelings in an upper bedroom of the aunt's house already mentioned, she observed that the door was open, and immediately formulated a reproachful and dignified request to Shuzzey : ' *Will* you shut the door, Mrs. Hughes, and not let the whole house hear me crying ? '

On the door being closed she resumed her suspended lamentations.

But now, though in spite of her great pain she cried little, the sound of her voice seemed to pierce our hearts. How could we ever have teased her ? How could we ever have been cross to her ? We tried to console ourselves by formulating plans for the future which should make up for and efface the memory of any past unkindness. We even began to carry out some already, making ourselves very busy in her garden, to which we transplanted all the best products of our own. But when, coming in to luncheon, filled with elation, we informed our mother of the fact, to our surprise and dismay she burst into tears.

' Oh, children, perhaps our little Aggie will never see her garden again ! '

She soon checked herself and wiped away her tears, but their effect on us was indescribable. To see mamma cry was in itself a thing so tragic and agonising as to be scarcely believable, but to hear it was possible that Aggie might die—never, never shall I forget the anguish of that moment !

And then the horror of not finding anyone willing or able to reassure us. 'J.,' otherwise Miss Jennings, the dearly loved and most sensible governess who succeeded Miss Canning, and whom we all united in adoring, would only say: 'Poor wee thing,' and shake her head; Mobie went about with a finger on a lip which trembled; Nurse Daly took a grisly satisfaction in detecting symptoms and portents which chilled our very blood; and the doctor came and went with so grave a face that we feared to question him.

But at last my mother was inspired—I use the word advisedly, for I think a mother's prayers pierce Heaven—to telegraph for the Dublin doctor —*my* doctor who had so skilfully rescued me from an almost similar predicament. And he came by the evening train and passed one anxious night beside the little patient, and by morning, oh, joy of joys! the extreme danger was passed.

We had wondered if Aggie realised how very near death she had been; she had asked, while the crisis was yet acute, to see the priest, and had had a private conversation with him on spiritual matters; but that the urgency of the situation was not fully understood by her was revealed a little later, when—the child being now on the road to recovery—my mother thought it safe to tell her that she had very nearly gone to Heaven. She had been lying, very small and inert, all her vitality seemed to be centred in her eyes, eyes which my

father had often said were like stars, and which were beginning to grow bright again under their darkened lids. They were fixed keenly on my mother now.

'I think, if I was so nearly dying, I ought to have been told,' said Aggie.

'But my darling, you are so little,' pleaded my mother, almost apologetically. 'God knows how innocent you are.'

But Aggie still gazed at her reproachfully.

'I ought to have been told,' she said.

This evidence of her concern for her soul filled us with renewed apprehension. Even the nurses said it did not seem natural, and Mrs. Daly in particular opined that she might slip through our fingers yet.

However, as time passed it became evident that the little patient was beginning to interest herself once more in the things of this world. After having been kept on starvation diet for many days, she electrified the doctor by asking for kidneys on toast and champagne, being very indignant that these dainties were not forthcoming.

'Why did you ask me what I'd *like*, then?' she demanded.

A more easily gratified wish was that for a baby doll—a real baby doll like those which Gertie and Mollie had had for Christmas. But she wished to have it *at once*, and two or three days must elapse before one could be procured from Dublin.

'Let her have my doll, mamma,' I proposed magnanimously. 'And I can wait for the other one.'

My baby was still in its box as, pending the completion of its clothes, it had never been played with. The long white petticoat had been in hand for a considerable time, for the making of tucks was a lengthy business; one of these was only partially completed, but I hastily pulled out the thread and proudly put on the garment over the other underclothes. Daly, by my mother's orders, had 'run up' a miniature baby's robe on her new sewing-machine. Feeling half virtuous, half, it must be owned, regretful, I carried my baby to Aggie's bedside, its darling little bald head protected from the draught by a shawl which I had been in process of making for it. This shawl was of rose-coloured merino, bound with narrow white ribbon. I had so far only completed half of this task, but I turned the raw edge in and hoped Aggie would not notice. I paused on the threshold almost awe-struck at the sight of the tiny, tiny white face on the pillow, but presently advanced, full of renewed enthusiasm.

'The new baby doll can't come until the end of the week;' I announced, 'so I am giving you mine.'

I looked expectantly at the little wasted face, prepared to see it light up; but the dark eyes were fixed critically on my precious bundle. I laid it beside her on the bed, just as in former days I had

seen Nurse Curley deliver Baby to my mother, and stood waiting for some expression of appreciation of my sacrifice. Aggie could not yet raise herself, but one tiny hand crept out from beneath the bed-clothes—it fingered the unfinished shawl, and presently pulled up the newly-made robe, revealing my petticoat, with its somewhat crumpled lace edging and its three finished tucks, adorned with minute spots of blood where I had pricked my fingers. The stitches were so small and neat that the thread had got rather soiled during the process of making them.

'It's a very dirty petticoat,' said Aggie, her voice faint indeed, but distinctly disapproving. 'You might have had it washed.'

Had not Aggie been so recently rescued from the jaws of death I should have been indignant; as it was I withdrew with a swelling heart.

We have both laughed many times over the incident, which I have always declared to be a proof that my sister's passion for daintiness was strong in—or near—death.

By and by she began to creep about, such an odd little witch-like figure. Daly made a new warm dress for her, designed to leave ample room for the rapid growth which illness was supposed to induce. The full skirt hung round her attenuated little frame, while over the many-pleated bodice she wore a knitted spencer of dark wool. Her pretty hair had been shaved, and its absence was

concealed by a chenille net, similar to that which Miss Larkin had been wont to wear. The poor mite was still so weak that she could not hold herself upright, and went about bent like a little old woman. But those bright dark eyes were as sharp as ever, and the vitality of her mind seemed to have increased since her illness. She did no lessons herself, but superintended the progress of ours, occasionally bringing confusion both to pupils and teacher by the suddenness and pertinacity of her remarks.

'Grandmamma Magpie,' J. called her, but even J. was occasionally flustered by an unexpected and sarcastic comment from the queer little hobbling figure. We, the chief sufferers, mindful of our recent resolution and still full of gratitude for the scarcely hoped-for restoration of our little mentor, submitted at first good-humouredly enough.

But one day, after having smarted under sundry corrections during the progress of the morning's lessons, we chanced to look into the schoolroom on our way out of doors, and there found Aggie in the act of inspecting our copy-books, commenting freely to J. on both writing and spelling.

'I should be ashamed to write like that,' said Aggie, 'and I'm only seven.'

It was then that the worm turned—the worm in question being Gertie, who, as a matter of fact, rather prided herself on her writing.

'You are the assistant-governess, I suppose?' said Gertie.

And I, still resenting the fact that J.'s attention had been called to a rather stupid fault of mine in spelling, hastened to follow suit.

'Yes, indeed,' said I, ironically. 'There'll be Miss Jennings and Miss Sweetman.'

Then I stopped short, conscience-stricken. How dreadful it would be if we made Aggie cry, when she had been so ill!

But Aggie did not cry. She looked at us with a queer little satirical twist of the lip.

'Well,' said Aggie, 'I know how things ought to be done, anyway.'

CHAPTER X

THE NEW GOVERNESS

MANY events occurred when I was eight years old. First of all dear Shuzzey died, and was succeeded by a nurse of a very different kind. She was a youngish and rather pretty woman, good-natured enough, and quite proficient with her needle, but indolent, and indisposed to enforce any nursery regulation which entailed a little extra trouble, or to put herself out more than she could help. The advantage which accrued from the neglect of the marrow-oil pot was counterbalanced by the curtailment of our ablutions.

Baths were no longer of daily occurrence. Had it not been for Mobie the hot one on Saturday nights might also have been omitted. It was true that our new Nanny had always some excuse ready; it was too hot or too cold or we had got up too late, or she felt sure we were 'threatening sore throats'; so for some months our morning toilet was considerably abridged.

It naturally did not occur to my mother to inquire if we had been duly washed, as our hands and faces were always clean, and dear Mobie—faithful and

devoted as she was—possessed to the full the Irish horror of carrying tales. She stood her ground on Saturday nights, but there her interference ended. She was getting very old and missed Shuzzey, whom she had loved and with whom she had squabbled for so long. The new nurse was suffered to have her way in most things.

But Miss Larkin, too, went away that year, and with the new governess things assumed a different aspect.

The new governess was a Scotswoman, and her name was Miss Dowd. She was about thirty-five, small and thin, but immensely alert and active. Her large, prominent blue eyes seemed to see everything; her voice, which, though rather deep, was very sweet, was never raised, but we minded a word from her more than a torrent of poor Miss Larkin's high-pitched scoldings. She held our attention from the first moment of arrival, for, though we put up our faces to be kissed, she did not kiss us.

'You don't know me yet,' she said, 'and I don't know you. When we get fond of each other it will be time enough to kiss; meanwhile it is quite enough to shake hands.'

So we shook hands, inwardly hoping that, in course of time, Miss Dowd might find herself able to get fond of us. As a matter of fact we were attracted by what was distinctly an appeal to our intelligence; we had not at all valued Miss Larkin's embraces, to which we had always

responded in the most perfunctory manner, and Miss Dowd's withholding of what she evidently felt to be a token of genuine affection raised her considerably in our eyes.

She did not know us; she could not as yet love us; and would not, therefore, make pretence. It would be pleasant, nevertheless, when she *did* love us, and would show us that she did.

We introduced her to our small possessions and told her about our lessons, and she listened with great interest to all that we said, but suddenly she asked a question: 'Are you always obedient? Are you good children?

We thought the question humorous, and giggled as we answered—'Not always.'

'Well,' responded Miss Dowd, in her cheerful, quick way, 'I must give you a warning, children. I shall begin as I mean to go on, and I want you to understand. I never let anybody off who is naughty. I always punish.

We looked at each other in some alarm and then back at Miss Dowd, who was still smiling pleasantly.

'Yes;' she said, 'I don't want you to make any mistake about it. I shall be as kind as I possibly can, but I am just. If you do wrong, you shall be punished, so now you know.'

She spoke in such a quiet, even voice, and looked so bright that we hardly believed her. With the exception of occasional fines we were hardly ever

punished. We were 'corrected,' as we called it, but only by word of mouth, and of late we had found it comparatively easy to cajole Miss Larkin into dispensing with some threatened chastisement. Threats had indeed become plentiful in the nursery; our new Nanny used to endeavour to cow us with the prospect of some gruesome and impossible reprisal for the faults we committed when in her charge; but though the little ones were occasionally terrorised, we elders never believed in them. It was with mixed feelings, half of incredulity, half of curiosity, that we waited the development of events.

Events were not long in developing. At first we liked Miss Dowd's system of teaching very much. We did longer lessons, to be sure, than with Miss Larkin; but then, how much more interesting they were! And when our brains began to feel tired and our limbs fidgety, we were agreeably surprised at being sent into the garden for a run if it was fine, or to play in the corridor if it was wet.

But Miss Dowd soon discovered our chief weaknesses. Gertie at this time was growing very fast, and was indolent and what Miss Dowd called 'lackadaisical'; I was 'excitable'; Nellie was 'passionate'; and Aggie was 'spoilt.'

One day when Gertie, having made repeated faults in a simple sum which had in consequence been rubbed out, was returning to her place with a

lagging step, much injured at the prospect of having to begin all over again, Miss Dowd looked at her sharply.

'Lackadaisical thing!' said Miss Dowd.

Gertie, who was very sensitive, instantly burst into tears, and I, who had always worshipped my sister, instantly became her champion.

'Miss Dowd,' I said, in a trembling voice, 'you are very unkind.'

'Come here, Mary,' said Miss Dowd, quietly.

I approached. Miss Dowd took my history-book out of my hand, closed it, and looked me straight in the eyes with her own strange light ones.

'Do you think, Mary,' said Miss Dowd, in her pleasantly conversational tone, 'do you think that is the proper way for a little girl to speak to her governess?'

A moment before I had thought myself quite right, in fact rather noble, in thus coming to Gertie's aid, but now I felt suddenly ashamed.

'No;' I whispered, hanging my head.

'Then,' pursued Miss Dowd, still quite amiably, 'don't you think a little girl who behaves like that deserves to be punished?'

I did not feel capable of offering an opinion on this point.

'Of course I must punish you,' went on Miss Dowd. 'I haven't quite settled how yet—I never fix on a child's punishment until I am quite cool

—but I will let you know presently. I must think it over.'

With that she handed me back my book and I retired to my place, feeling very small, and a good deal alarmed. *How* was Miss Dowd going to punish me? All sorts of dreadful visions of beating or starvation, or being shut up in the dark, flashed across my imaginative mind.

I felt myself turning pale, and when our lessons were over and the others ran out as usual, eager to play at building a fort, which was then our favourite game, I crept miserably after them, slowly dragging my feet. Miss Dowd meanwhile having donned hat and cloak, and, as usual, provided herself with a large can of water for making what we called our mortar, came briskly downstairs and encountered me just outside the garden door.

'Well, child,' she said brightly, 'why don't you run and play with the others? Come, now, run away and make the most of your time.'

As she bent beneath the weight of the heavy can which she carried backwards and forwards every day for our delectation, and looked down at me with those kind, merry eyes, something melted within me. I threw my arms round her with a sob.

'Oh, Miss Dowd, I wish I hadn't said you were unkind. I *don't* think you are unkind, really! You're very, very kind!'

Now Miss Larkin would have repulsed me, or if she had bestowed an unwelcome peck on my fore-

head, would have accompanied the action with the remark that she was willing to forgive but could never forget, and she hoped it would be a lesson to me. But Miss Dowd set down the can and kissed me, for the first time and quite warmly.

'Thank you, Mary,' she said. 'I am sure you mean what you say.'

'I do,' I cried fervently. Then, emboldened by her unusual softness I pleaded: 'Do, do forgive me, Miss Dowd. I'll never say such a thing again.'

'Certainly I'll forgive you, Mary,' she rejoined. 'We'll say no more about it. Now run on and play, my dear, and tell the others I am coming as fast as I can with the water.'

Off I ran with my spirits leaping sky-high, and Miss Dowd followed, her slight figure bowed nearly double, but carrying the can carefully so that none of its contents should be spilt. We were all very happy that morning, and I was particularly so, for my little heart overflowed with gratitude at the supposed condonement of my offence.

But when I was washing my hands before luncheon, Miss Dowd came into our room. It was a March day, and there was a small wood fire in the grate. Miss Dowd squatted back on her heels before this fire and warmed her hands in silence for a moment or two, while I, entirely unsuspicious, went on soaping mine, being particular about my knuckles as she had taught me. Miss Dowd had

speedily put an end to the happy-go-lucky state of things which had come about under the new nurse's rule, and not only were the daily baths enforced, but a plentiful use of soap and water insisted upon at all times.

'Oh, by the way, Mary,' she said presently, in a quiet tone as though she had just remembered something, 'I have now decided what your punishment is to be; you will go to bed twenty minutes earlier to-night.'

I turned round aghast; the penalty, though a light one, being an entirely unexpected sequel to our reconciliation.

'But you said you forgave me, Miss Dowd,' I stammered.

'So I did, Mary, and so I do. But you know I warned you that I never go back on my word.'

I was inclined to sulk, but, getting up from her crouching posture, she came and put her hand on my shoulder.

'Now be a sensible little girl, and make the best of it,' she said. 'You and I are quite friends now, and will understand each other from this out.'

I looked back at her, insensibly 'putting a good face on,' for I recognised the truth of the words which she had spoken on the night of her arrival. She was kind, but she was just.

From that moment, though I was very much afraid of Miss Dowd, I loved her dearly.

It was not such a dreadful thing to go to bed

twenty minutes earlier, not half so hard to bear as not coming down to dessert (in which case even William knew we were in disgrace), or going to bed by day, which was the worst of all; nevertheless I felt very melancholy when we came downstairs as usual. I dreaded the moment when I should be dispatched to the nursery, and my mother's inquiry as to the reason, and Miss Dowd's subsequent recital of my lapse. I could hardly eat my orange, or play with the woolly mats in the drawing-room as usual. I crouched on a stool at my mother's feet, feeling not only a criminal, but a hypocrite, when she passed her hand kindly over my hair, and said she thought I looked tired.

Miss Dowd was tatting, an accomplishment she had vainly endeavoured to teach us. My mother, in a laborious and painstaking manner, was stitching strips of brown and pink satin together. Gertie, Nellie, and Aggie were vociferously playing at 'dipping children in the sea,' the rolled-up sheepskin mats representing the children, while the polished space between the folding-doors was supposed to be the sea.

It was a simple and stimulating game. You caught up the mat, imitating the wails of the supposed victim; then with a run and a slide on the shining boards, feverishly launched your bundle. Your voice became alternately persuasive as that of the bathing-woman, or peevish and rebellious as that of the child, the laments of the

latter being usually merged into vigorous hisses, supposed to be produced by the salt water.

But instead of joining in this delirious pastime I sat, as has been said, leaning against my mother's knee, and stealing a glance every now and then at Miss Dowd, almost longing for the time of suspense to be over, and yet dreading the sensation which, as I imagined, must ensue.

At last she looked at her watch and said: 'Time for you to go, Mary.'

And I stood up and said good night to my mother. Whether she was touched by something piteous in my face, or whether Miss Dowd had privately warned her, I cannot say; but, to my great relief, she asked no questions — merely kissing me very kindly and blessing me as was her custom, with even greater affection than usual.

When I reached the nursery, however, I found unexpected champions there. The new nurse grumbled that a body was never let sit down for a minute in peace and quietness, and that she didn't want to be at the orders of any governess; while Mobie, pinching her lips, said I might as well play with my doll for a bit, for my bed wasn't ready for me yet. Though, full of new-found virtue and also of a wholesome fear of Miss Dowd, I besought them with tears to let me carry out her behest, they were so long in their preparations, and the process of undressing me was accomplished in so dawdling a fashion, that Miss Dowd and the remainder of her

charges had arrived in the nursery before my head had touched the pillow.

A sharp passage-of-arms between her and Mobie ensued, to which I listened, feeling most uncomfortable, and wishing with all my heart that Mobie did not think it necessary to take my part. I don't quite know how the matter ended, but suspect that my mother intervened in the interests of discipline, for Mobie used subsequently to shake her head and place her finger on her lip when Miss Dowd was mentioned, which cryptic signs were meant to convey that, though her thoughts were free, her lips were sealed.

Miss Dowd did, indeed, subject us to a pretty sharp course of discipline—her chief aim being to teach us self control; sometimes displaying an almost excessive zeal.

I remember, for instance, one day, when we were all sitting on a bench under one of the trees, Nellie, who was then about six years old, suddenly discovered that a large, fat, whitey-brown caterpillar was galloping, as fast as its multiplicity of legs would enable it, up the back of her frock, just between her shoulders where her short arms could not reach it. She instantly and very naturally began to scream, violently wriggling and squirming the while.

'You must stop making that noise, Nellie,' said Miss Dowd. 'The caterpillar is quite harmless and

won't hurt you. As soon as you are quiet I will remove it.'

But Nellie would not be quiet. She not only screamed louder than ever, but kicked, while scalding tears began to pour down her cheeks. Gertie and I, in spite of our fear of Miss Dowd, implored to be allowed to come to her rescue.

'Not until Nellie has stopped crying,' said Miss Dowd, quelling us with one of her sharp glances. 'There's no use getting into a passion, Nellie—I shall not take away that caterpillar until you have controlled yourself.'

'But it's getting on to her neck, Miss Dowd,' we pleaded, squirming in sympathy.

'It won't hurt her if it does,' rejoined Miss Dowd. 'A caterpillar is a perfectly harmless insect.'

We thought Nellie would have convulsions when the creature did actually creep on to her neck; but, finding that neither screams nor sobs were of any avail, the poor little thing did make a mighty effort to check them, upon which Miss Dowd picked off the reptile, and after holding it out between her finger and thumb while she discoursed on the futility of upsetting one's self about a creature which could not possibly injure anyone, and which would in course of time develop into a perfectly beautiful butterfly, she laid it tenderly on one of the overhanging leaves of a beech tree.

She endeavoured in the same way to conquer my

almost insane dread of cows, without, I may say, the least success.

The 'fort' at which we worked perseveringly was situated in the middle of our park, where a number of cattle were grazing. It was a mound of earth which had originally been removed during the construction of a large water-tank, and which it was intended to level in course of time. Meanwhile we found it very amusing to run up and down its sloping sides, and eventually, as has been said, devoted ourselves to placing it in a state of defence. When the large can of water which Miss Dowd daily carried to the spot did not suffice, one or other of us would run back to the house to fetch some more in our own little cans or pails.

I had volunteered to do this one day, and was about to start on my errand when I discovered that the cows had approached, unperceived by me, to the other side of the mound, and that I should have to pass through their midst. I immediately retracted my promise and, on being questioned by our governess, confessed that I was afraid of the cows.

'Afraid of the cows!' ejaculated Miss Dowd. 'Why, they were all round us yesterday when we went back, and they didn't hurt you then, so why should they hurt you now?'

'Oh, but you were with us,' said I.

'Well, do you suppose that if the cows wanted to run after us they would mind whether I were

with you or not?' rejoined she. 'Run along now, and fetch the water quickly, my dear.'

'Do, please, come too,' I besought her.

'Well,' said Miss Dowd, 'I'll go with you part of the way, just to show you that those poor animals are not thinking of harming you, but you must be a sensible girl and come back by yourself.'

I was grateful for even this slight respite, and hoped that, while I was still under the protection of Miss Dowd, the cattle might move a little farther off.

When we had traversed half the distance which lay between us and the house, she paused, and suddenly loosed the hand with which I had desperately clung to hers. The cattle, alas, had not taken the trouble to move out of our way.

'Now, go on,' she said encouragingly; 'you see the poor things don't even raise their heads to look at you. Don't be a silly little girl; nothing will happen to you.'

I set off slowly and in a circuitous manner, wandering round the back of one cow and edging away from the nose of another; when I came to a clear space I ran. Once I looked back, hoping that Miss Dowd had remained at her post midway in the field, so that she could come to my rescue if need be; but to my horror I saw that Miss Dowd had turned and was walking composedly back towards the fort. I reached the house at length, and filled my little watering-can, being as long

over the operation as possible, always in the hope that the cattle would have moved away; but alas, when I emerged I found them there in closer phalanx, if anything, than before.

The house and pleasure-grounds were divided from the park by a sunk fence, with one gate opening into the back avenue which was nearest to the fort, and the other on the front approach. Instead of taking the shortest way I now conceived the brilliant idea of going out by the more distant of these 'circle gates' as we called them, and approaching the fort by a roundabout route. My cowardly expedient, which took ever so much longer, met with no reward. There were even more cattle on this side, and the mound of earth being higher effectually concealed Miss Dowd and my sisters from my view. When I was about half-way across, my predicament seemed to me truly awful. Not only was I surrounded by cattle, but one particular animal was looking at me, tossing its head, swishing its tail, and stamping its foot. Flies were probably accountable for these agitating symptoms, but to my mind they were tokens of imminent danger.

I stood still and loudly screamed: 'Miss Dowd! Miss Dowd!'

But the only result was that four or five other cows raised their heads and looked at me. In a moment, as I imagined, I should be hemmed in; but there might be still time to escape.

Throwing down my watering-can I fled for dear life, my heart thumping, the air whistling in my ears, and arrived hardly able to breathe, much less to speak, on the other side of the mound. There they all were tranquilly digging, while Miss Dowd, seated on the slope, was tatting.

'Here she is!' someone cried joyfully, and then: 'Why, she hasn't brought *any* water.'

There was a chorus of indignant voices. Three pairs of eyes, brown and blue and hazel, were immediately fixed on me. What had I been doing? Why had I been such an age? What had become of the watering-can?

'I dropped it in the grass,' I gasped, and then: 'The cows—the cows were after me!'

Miss Dowd looked up from her tatting.

'But they don't seem to have caught you, Mary,' she said; 'and as a cow has four legs and you have only two, and as their legs are much longer than yours, I think if they had really been running after you, you probably would not have got here at all. Now, don't you think you are a foolish little girl?'

I owned that I was, and then she pocketed her work and got up.

'Well, children, it's time to go in and dress for dinner.'

I was devoutly thankful at this announcement, for I had been dreading lest Miss Dowd should send me back for another canful. I had to put up

with the ill-humour of the other children, who complained most virtuously of the way in which I had forced them to waste their time. How could they go on building a fort when there was no water? And why did I offer to fetch it if I did not intend to keep my word?

'We won't trust you to get it again,' said somebody.

'Oh, yes,' put in Miss Dowd composedly. 'Of course you'll trust Mary. Mary's going to be a sensible little girl after this.'

And then my heart went down to my boots, for I knew I should have to accomplish the dreaded task on the morrow.

Indeed I had; and on many subsequent days I took my turn with the others in replenishing the water-supply. Sometimes the cows were there and sometimes they were not, and I suppose my fears grew less in time, or at least I learnt to say nothing about them. Nevertheless Miss Dowd's Spartan treatment was not successful in my case, for to this day I would rather make a long circuit than pass through a field of cows.

But under her tuition we learnt a certain amount of self-control; we learnt, moreover, to respect certain high ideals, and to be honourable with ourselves and with each other. If we did not venture to champion each other with indiscretion, we were allowed to plead quietly, and forbidden to carry tales. Miss Larkin and our nurses had previously

rather encouraged this practice, as being convenient to themselves; but Miss Dowd impressed on us that, unless we found ourselves bound 'deep down in our consciences' to report that something was going on which must be brought to the notice of our superiors, we were never to report another's fault.

It was characteristic of Miss Dowd to leave us without saying good-bye, and for a time we were inconsolable, for, in spite of her severity, we had become most warmly attached to her. It was some comfort to hear afterwards that Miss Dowd had avoided taking leave of us, not from any lack of affection, but because, on the contrary, she had grown so fond of us that she could not bear to say farewell.

CHAPTER XI

PETS

'THERE's been a death in the house to-day, miss,' said William, one morning.

It was during Miss Larkin's reign, and she looked up hastily.

'Yes,' went on William. 'Lily the rabbit, miss,' and he grinned appreciatively at his own sally.

'Go on with your lessons, children,' said Miss Larkin, who did not encourage William to be humorous.

We bore the loss of Lily with equanimity; she was a large uninteresting white rabbit with pink eyes, too heavy to carry with any comfort.

Her husband, Harry, who had died a month or two previously, had been more interesting; but then he bit us whenever we tried to take hold of him. After Lily's decease we swore we would never keep rabbits again; but a year or two later, when the steward brought in three tiny wild babies, we changed our minds.

How sweet they were, those brown furry balls, with their transparent ears and their lovely big brown eyes. We christened them immediately—George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Mrs.

Siddons—and kept them in all sorts of odd places; in baskets, and even in tin boxes, being of course always careful to leave the lid open for ventilation. We had begun by putting them in Lily's discarded hutch, which possessed a beautiful wire run, but George Washington, who was an enterprising person, burrowed under this run and escaped altogether; while Benjamin Franklin made his way into the kitchen, where he was discovered lapping the cat's milk. Mrs. Siddons, being weaker and less adventurous than the others, remained in the hutch, twitching a disconsolate nose and refusing to partake of any of the choice dainties with which we provided her.

But Benjamin's proceedings had enlightened us, and the two little waifs were thenceforth accommodated with milk enough to support an ordinary calf. During their brief existence indoors they had a variety of adventure. Benjamin Franklin, in particular, wandered all over the house, being discovered one morning tranquilly washing his face inside the kitchen fender. He vanished mysteriously one day, and whether he fell a victim to a cat or a dog, or merely ran off to join his little wild brother, we never discovered.

Mrs. Siddons belonged to me and accompanied me everywhere, sleeping in her tin box beside my bed at night, and being carried about in a basket by day. Her diet was curious and varied, but for some time she appeared to thrive.

One day, however, when she was lying in her basket while I was at work in my garden, I heard steps behind me, and observed that one of the garden boys was surreptitiously poking a lettuce leaf into Mrs. Siddons' retreat.

'They does be liking them,' he explained, as he caught my indignant glance.

I opened the basket and peered in. Mrs. Siddons was certainly munching the lettuce with every appearance of enjoyment. I was delighted, one of my chief sources of satisfaction being that I could hold one end of the leaf in question while Mrs. Siddons nibbled at the other.

'Mrs. Siddons is eating out of my hand,' I cried ecstatically to the others. 'Come and see my rabbit eating out of my hand.'

I was so delighted with this performance that I exhibited it several times that day, and in my eager desire to gratify my beloved pet, I put lettuce leaves in the tin box at night, instead of the crust with which Mrs. Siddons used to regale herself during the early hours of the morning. The more lettuce did Mrs. Siddons consume the larger became the portion which I bestowed on her, and Mrs. Siddons nibbled and nibbled and appeared much gratified by my ministrations—so much gratified in fact that, aroused in the morning by squeals and scrabbles from the tin box, I rarely found a scrap of the provender remaining.

One evening, one sad evening, I brought two lettuces in from the garden.

'Now,' said I to Mrs. Siddons, 'greedy as you are, I think these ought to satisfy you. Perhaps you'll let me have a wink or two of sleep to-morrow morning.'

I was quoting from Nurse Curley's adjurations to Baby, and endeavoured to adopt her tone and manner as well as her words.

I slept soundly on the following morning, for Mrs. Siddons was unusually quiet; but alas, when I took off the lid of my box a tragic sight met my gaze. Mrs. Siddons lay stretched in the middle stone dead, but not a trace of either lettuce remained. She had eaten both, and succumbed to her greed.

Ill-luck indeed seemed to overtake the wild things of which we made pets. I remember a certain skylark which I brought up by hand, it having been rescued from the mowers, while still a mere skinny object with scarcely a tuft of fluff. Pat, as I called him, throve under my care, though, as I could not make up my mind to feed him with worms, his fare consisted only of bread and water. He was amazingly tame, and used to flap his apologies for wings at me with joy, when he summoned me at early dawn to minister to his needs. He would sleep in my hand, and flutter towards me when I called him. But alas! when the governess for whom I had undertaken to bring

him up carried him off to present him to a former pupil, he soon died, though I had impressed on her to keep to the diet which had had such satisfactory results. The pupil in question had attempted to feed him with canary seed!

I wept bitter tears for Pat, and vowed I would never cage another wild thing. Nevertheless, with the advent of a French governess and tales of a most fascinating bullfinch which she had brought up from the nest, the desire seized me to follow her example.

No bullfinch was to be found, however. War was perhaps waged too fiercely against a genus so destructive to fruit trees; but one day I was told that 'Mr Lynch,' the Maryborough mason, who was then doing some repairs, had got a bird for me, and was even then waiting outside the boot-room door.

How joyfully I hailed Mr. Lynch, and how jocularly did he respond to my greeting! He was a big, fat, good-natured man, at all times a great favourite of ours.

'Aye, missy, I've somethin' for you here. I found the nest with four of them in it, just ready to fly.'

'Bullfinches, Mr. Lynch?' I cried ecstatically.

'Well, they're finches of some sort, Miss Mary. Let's see now, bullfinches has them crookedy beaks, hasn't they? I think this little fella must be a goldfinch then. But sure they're elegant little

birds. They do have yella on their wings, and their heads is red when they get their right feathers.'

I eagerly declared my readiness to accept a goldfinch, and then looked anxiously about.

'But where's the cage, Mr. Lynch?'

'Och, bedad, I haven't a cage! But I have the little fella safe and snug here.'

To my horror Mr. Lynch plunged his hand into the depths of his trousers pocket and extracted a small limp, brown bird, whose little wings were indeed flecked with gold, but whose head was as yet untouched by red. It lay very still in his hand.

'Oh, Mr. Lynch,' I shrieked. 'It's dead!'

'Troth, I believe it is, miss,' rejoined Lynch, in a tone of dolorous surprise. 'Think of that now! It must have been frettin' after the others. But never mind, missy, sure there's three or four more in it. I'll bring you another to-morrow.'

'Oh, but don't—don't put him in your pocket,' I pleaded.

'I have to put it in my pocket, Miss Mary,' he returned seriously. 'Sure, I have to keep the cratur warm. He'd be pinin' altogether for want of the nest if I didn't. But I'll bring him in to-morrow morning the moment I get here now, without waitin' for dinner-time.'

Only half convinced, I withdrew, and the following morning Mr. Lynch duly produced another stone-dead nestling from his trousers pocket.

On this occasion I burst into tears and my lamentations were mixed with wrath.

'I told you it would die,' I sobbed. 'I think it's very—very cruel of you, Mr. Lynch.'

I can still see the poor mason's wounded and discomfited face.

Macky, the cook, came to our rescue, soothing Mr. Lynch's lacerated feelings by informing him the poor child was that fond of birds she went near out of her mind if anything happened one, and consoling me by the promise of the loan of 'a little weeshy dawshy covered basket' which Mr. Lynch could easily carry on his finger, and where the little bird could cuddle as snug as anything, until I was able to transfer him to a cage.

The third venture was successful. When I opened the lid of the covered basket next morning, I saw my Dicky, not by any means disposed to cuddle, but standing erect and wild-eyed in a corner. While I yet gazed, he spread his immature gold-flecked wings and flew into the boot-room, where he was captured with some difficulty.

My dear little Dicky! How I loved him. He lived for eleven years, during which he was the joy of my heart. I cannot imagine any little bird being more tame—though my mother assured me that on this point he was not to be compared to the canary she had had in her childhood. My Dicky did not, it is true, climb through the rings of the toast-rack, or allow himself to be handed with

the vegetables; but he perched on my head or my hand when I invited him to do so, took hempseed from my mouth, frequently went to sleep on my shoulder and, when I tilted back my head, hopped all over my face, peering curiously into my eyes and nostrils, and pecking gently at my eyebrows. Every day he and his wife, Serina, bathed together in a large soup plate, Dicky enjoying the performance so much that he sang in the intervals of sousing himself. He subsequently found considerable difficulty in flying up to the window-ledge in his drenched condition, and would make several attempts, tumbling down again and scolding violently, as if his want of success was somebody's else's fault.

I have already told how Tiny, our black pony, and the donkey, Cadichon, his companion, added to the joy of our red-letter days.

For a long time our only house-dog was a terrier called Spot, who could, as a matter of fact, hardly be called a house-dog, as he elected to live in the laundry, where he slept underneath one of the ironing tables, in the intervals of consuming meals which would have sustained a mastiff. He only roused himself at the ringing of the workmen's bell, and would begin to yawn and stretch himself and sit up, with pricked ears, as the hour approached for this event. Nevertheless, when it occurred, it appeared to cause him the most excruciating agony. His long-drawn shrieks and howls were promptly

taken up by the yard-dog, Tanner, by the herd's collie, Fan, and by any stray cur that might be in the neighbourhood. Thrice daily the yard echoed to a chorus of sounds which might have proceeded from Hades. When Spot's last long-drawn wail died away he would lick his lips, wag his tail, and snuggle down in his basket again, hunching his shoulders as though to say: 'Thank goodness that job's done!'

A beautiful Pomeranian, called Puff, engrossed our affections and nibbled our bare legs for a short time, but was then handed over to the gardener, as he was remarkable for many attributes of the modern Hun, and could not be civilised. And then, oh, then, Fussy came! Was there ever such a faithful, loving, comical little dog as Fussy? or was it only because he was our own dog that we loved him so dearly? He was more of a Scotch terrier than anything else. I don't suppose his pedigree would have borne rigid inspection, but he was very pretty. He had lovely large brown eyes that almost spoke at times, a fluffy pepper-and-salt coat; a feathery tail; short, funny little paws; and a long, wise face, the tip of his little red tongue always shining between his teeth. All these qualities were not observable when my mother bought him. She had gone from one Dublin dog-fancier to another without finding any animal to which *she* took a fancy, but all at once came across a man standing at a street corner, holding two or

three dogs on leashes It was a pouring wet day, and Fussy was sitting with his beautiful tail tucked under him and his soft coat looking like the coat of a drowned rat; but his pathetic eyes were all alive, and my mother declared that as her cab went slowly rumbling past he fixed these eyes imploringly on her.

To stop the cab, inquire if the dog were for sale, and strike a bargain was the work of a few minutes, and presently the little fellow, with difficulty restrained from jumping on to her lap, was licking her hands with a paroxysm of devotion. He was then about two years old, and, as he was a very busy, important little creature, always trotting about the house, poking an inquiring nose here and there, and apparently much occupied with grave private concerns of his own, we gave him the name of Fussy.

Fussy slept in a box in my room, wrapped in a green rug which I carefully tucked round him at night, and which he thoughtfully chewed during the weary morning hours. He had a weakness for chewing, and frequently swallowing, all kinds of incongruous things. His green rug soon became very ragged and disreputable, as he usually ate between six or eight inches of it every morning; one day he disposed of three yards of black ribbon velvet which, on discovering the end hanging from his mouth, I began to haul out piece by piece, until someone observed what I was doing, and decided

that, on the whole, it would be better for Fussy's internal economy to leave it where it was. But his greatest iniquity was when he ate the whole shoulder and forearm of a new winter jacket of mine, which I was obliged to wear for the rest of the season, disfigured by large patches.

Fussy devoted himself from the first to my mother; nothing would induce him to follow any of us when she was by. He would sit for hours on the lawn beside her, snapping at the flies while she read, only varying the monotony of the performance by an occasional attempt to catch a swallow. And this though, in his doggy soul, he must have been longing to escort us through the woods, where there were bunnies to run after, and beautiful holes to scratch in, and always the chance of discovering the carcase of some dead bird or mouse to roll on.

Fussy knew Sunday quite well, and never attempted to follow my mother downstairs, when she was leaving her room preparatory to setting out to church. It was a large room, with five windows, and he would run from one to the other of these, his long body enabling him to peer out of each in turn as he stood on his hind-legs. It was almost more pathetic than comic to see the wistful little grey face pressed against the pane, then vanishing and reappearing at a point whence he thought he could obtain a better view of the retreating car. When it was quite out of sight he

would mournfully possess himself of something which she had worn : a slipper or perhaps a glove, and would jump with it on to the bed, lying quite still with it between his paws. It was a curious fact that he never attempted to eat the article in question; he simply comforted himself with the contact.

Once, when my mother left home for some weeks, the poor little dog spent the entire time lying thus on her bed; he could scarcely be induced to eat; in fact it was only by poking the food into his mouth that we could get him to swallow enough to keep himself alive. Nothing would persuade him to go for a walk, and in fact, it was only by ringing the front-door bell that one could beguile him into coming downstairs at all. He perfectly distinguished its sound from that of every other bell, and always came trotting eagerly down, poor little faithful doggie, expecting that his mistress had returned. His little face bore an expression of almost human disappointment when he found she was not there, and he would turn about and retire mournfully upstairs again, with his tail drooping and his whole attitude one of extreme dejection.

When she came back his joy knew no bounds; he jumped on her, licking her face and hands unreproved—who could object to his dear, sticky little embraces when he was reduced to almost a skeleton for his mistress's sake? He tore round and round like a lunatic, and finally ensconced

himself on her lap, from which she had not the heart to dislodge him—being in consequence somewhat inconvenienced by the necessity of carrying him about in the skirt of her dress for the remainder of the day.

Fussy had one predominant passion—a passion for what is known in cooks' parlance as the 'pig-tub.' In spite of all precautions, frequent scoldings and some whippings, he persisted in visiting this terrible receptacle whenever he got a chance, the result being that he was unapproachable for the rest of the day, and was frequently indisposed. He was very sly about this weakness of his, and used, by every means in his power, to endeavour to prevent our finding him out in his sins, though the fact invariably betrayed itself. I have seen him stealing into the house by the back door after one of these forbidden excursions, creeping up the servants' stairs, and then come blithely trotting down the front stairs in answer to my mother's summons, barking and frisking as though he had just emerged from the schoolroom. On these occasions he was frequently sent to bed as a punishment. He knew quite well it was a punishment, and would drop his tail and hang his head and go upstairs all by himself, sitting dismally in his box until someone came to tell him that his penance was at an end.

We taught him all sorts of tricks: he could beg, he could 'die,' he could walk on his hind-legs,

shake hands, hold a biscuit on his nose until you counted three, and, in short, was quite accomplished as dogs go. But, in addition, there were several tricks which I have never seen any other dog do; he would help himself to a piece of biscuit placed at a certain distance on the table by delicately propelling it within range of his mouth, first with one little paw, then with the other; when it was near enough he would take hold of it most daintily, never dropping a crumb. He had a little pipe of his own and an old tobacco box full of crushed biscuits, and very comical he looked sitting up straight and stiff with his pipe in his mouth. When he had 'smoked' long enough, we rewarded him by turning the pipe upside down, and allowing him to eat the biscuits which had done duty for tobacco.

He had a peculiar weakness for all sweets, and particularly for butterscotch, and we used generally to give him a piece of this on his birthdays, which took place on an average two or three times a year. He would sit in front of us, watching us with delight and anxiety while we stripped the sticky slab of its protecting lead paper, and would then take the dainty in his mouth, trotting off with it to some safe corner where a newspaper had been thoughtfully spread for him. There, crouching down, and holding the butterscotch tightly between his paws, he would begin to chew and suck it with the greatest possible gusto. Every now and then his teeth would become locked in the glutinous

compound, and then springing up in great alarm, he would rush to one of his child comrades and take a flying leap into her lap, imploring us with many sniffs and sneezes to set his jaws at liberty. Sometimes we took advantage of Fussy's known partiality for the sweetmeat in question, which we also happened to be extremely fond of, and would make him the bearer of a petition to high quarters. One day during a summer visit to the seaside it chanced to be too wet for us to go out; we had none of our toys with us and were, in consequence, very dull. It was suggested that we should have a party, but of what use was it to have a party when there was no occasion to celebrate and nothing to make a party with?

'Suppose,' suggested Aggie, after a dubious and dismal pause, 'we make it Fussy's birthday and send him to ask mamma for some butterscotch for a present for him.'

'Fussy had a birthday only two months ago,' returned somebody doubtfully.

'Never mind, he can have another now. Dogs may have birthdays oftener than we, you know. Five or six puppies are generally born on the same day, and as a rule there is never more than one baby at a time, therefore I should think dogs have more birthdays than we do. Let us pretend it is his birthday, anyhow.'

Aggie's reasoning was unanswerable; we immediately brightened up, and I was com-

missioned to write a letter on Fussy's behalf; it was supposed to be written by himself, and began, I remember, 'Honoured Madam,' and formulated his request for sixpence wherewith to buy butterscotch, in the most grandiloquent language any dog could master, and finally dropped into poetry, which not being of a very high order, he modestly reminded my mother was only 'doggerel.' We rolled up the petition, tied it at either end with blue ribbon, sealed with an immense lavishness of wax, and fastened it to Fussy's collar. Then we opened the door, knowing that Fussy would make straight for my mother's room. In a very few minutes he returned, the bearer of a neat little three-cornered note. This was addressed, not to Fussy himself—but to—

The Misses Sweetman,
Paupers,
Mendicity House.

However, as it contained the coveted sixpence, the sarcasm was condoned.

I remember that seaside summer well. It was spent at the most lovely, wild, unsophisticated place one can imagine, a little village situated on the north-eastern coast, amid bleak, grand, purple hills, the summit of some of which looked almost black. There was a river, too, and a beautiful beach upon which the great waves used to come roaring and leaping in, dashing the salt spray

high above our heads as we stood on the shingle, and making such thunderous sounds that we had to communicate with each other by signs.

There was an abundance of seaweed on that shore, and we discovered that poor little Fussy had deemed it his duty to clear away the stones to which it clung. He exhausted himself—dragging out one after another of these boulders, pausing a moment to cough and choke and shiver on the shingle; then, after thoughtfully selecting one or other of his friends to rub his little wet sandy person against, and shaking himself violently as she retreated from his briny caresses, he would once more dash into the surf to tackle another miniature rock.

Fussy was much liked in the quaint little country inn where we lodged. It is true the old chambermaid occasionally complained of him, on account of his playful habit of seizing and shaking every single mat that lay outside the doors of the rooms as he went up or down stairs or along the passages, tossing them each in a tumbled heap in anywhere but the right place when he had done with them. He also liked jumping upon the beds when he came in wet and chilly after his seaside labours, and curling himself up just where the sheet was turned down. But with the exception of the chambermaid, every one knew and loved him. The 'boots,' indeed, sometimes accused him of being a proud little dog, when he trotted past him on his daily

walks with us, without appearing to acknowledge him, for on other occasions when Fussy was not accompanied by his family, he was extremely condescending and affable. He frequently visited the cook, and was on most friendly terms with the landlord. But great was the astonishment of the owner of the solitary shop in the village when I went in there one day, announcing my wish to buy him a pipe.

'A pipe, miss?' said the woman in astonishment, then suddenly bethinking herself. 'Oh, I suppose wan o' them clay ones; ye'll be wanting them for blowing soap bubbles. Four a penny them is, miss.'

'Oh no,' I explained politely. 'I want a wooden one for the little dog.'

She gasped: 'For the dog, miss?'

'Yes,' I returned with modest pride, 'our little dog is very clever—he always smokes a pipe; but I left his behind.'

'Oh that indeed, miss,' said the woman, staring at me oddly.

I saw her pointing at me over her shoulder as she fastened up the packet, making some remark meanwhile under her breath to her daughter, who craned forward her neck with evident eagerness to stare at me.

Afterwards I heard that a rumour was current in the village that the poor young lady was not right in her head.

Fussy's little life was to end as happily as it had begun. After he had been with us some years, my mother decided to take us to Brussels for educational purposes, and lent Fussy meanwhile to a grown-up cousin of ours. I feel quite sure the dear little dog never forgot his old friends, but he had royal times of it in his new home. His master became so devotedly attached to him that he subsequently refused to give him up. His infatuation for him was, in fact, quite extravagant. Fussy's old box and green rug were replaced by a beautiful bed, with pillows and blankets and actually sheets! He had indiarubber boots for muddy days, and was allowed to scour the fields and woods in the chase of bunnies to his heart's content. Occasionally, when his male friends reproached his master for his weakness in this respect, Fussy would be summoned with loud and angry calls and whistles, which the little dog occasionally obeyed, but more frequently did not. When at length, wearied with the chase, the truant returned to fling himself panting at his master's feet, the latter would seize his walking-stick and severely *beat the ground,* during which castigation Fussy wagged his tail and stared in his face with, I am informed, a distinct smile.

It is now many years since Fussy died, though he lived to an extreme old age. I have known and loved many dogs since, but I feel that none was quite as fascinating.

CHAPTER XII

CLOTHES

UNTIL we were seven years old we wore white, all four of us—all five, I may say, for even Baby's little knickerbocker suits were of white washing material all the year round, though in winter these were supplemented by woolly coats when he went out—a garden coat of very thick, fleecy stuff (washable like everything else), which was a huge joy, because it had a number of pockets and immense buttons; and a white fur one for best. We used to feel very proud of Baby in this best coat. He was a well-made little fellow, big and sturdy for his age, with fair hair and a milk-white skin; and the effect of his pink cheeks and blue eyes over the white fur was extremely attractive.

I remember in the midst of a certain railway journey to Dublin, when Baby was gazing with very solemn eyes all round the carriage, his chubby hands in white woolly gloves, clasped on his knees; his new white boots sticking out straight and stiff from beneath his white gaiters, one of our travelling companions, an old gentleman who had been eyeing him for some time, suddenly inquired

with a chuckle of his opposite neighbour, who chanced to be another old gentleman—

'Have you heard the news?'

'No—what?'

'Rather serious news. The polar bear has escaped from the Zoological Gardens!'

Baby brought his grave blue eyes to bear, first on one and then on the other, and then a slow smile overspread his face. He had been called a white bear before, and was quicker at discovering its identity than David Copperfield in realising who was meant by 'Brooks of Sheffield.'

But to resume. White garments of all descriptions were discarded on our seventh birthdays, after which we went through oddly-varying phases as regarded clothes.

The death of Shuzzey inaugurated a new era, as has already been said, and it may be guessed that the nurse who was so perfunctory about our ablutions was equally indifferent with regard to other matters appertaining to our toilet. I inherited Gertie's frocks as a matter of course, and Nellie's generally descended to Aggie, though sometimes a specially elaborate garment travelled downwards through the whole four of us. When only low-necked white embroidered frocks were in question all was well; but at a later date, when dresses of stuff or velveteen were thus passed on it was a different story. Gertie was tall for her age, and plump; I was a thin little creature, possessing a

rather long and particularly slender throat. Well do I remember a certain black velvet frock of Gertie's, the waist of which flapped about my hips (in those days long-waisted frocks for children had not become fashionable), while the bodice positively floated over my poor little skinny shoulders. But Nurse Daly assured me I would grow to it, and that the long skirts would keep my legs warm.

I remember making a tearful complaint to my mother, which I emphasised by gathering up the superfluous folds of the bodice in both hands and assuring her that I felt a draught all down my back. But she only laughed and said ventilation was wholesome.

Nevertheless, there was one frock of Gertie's which I much looked forward to possessing. It was a print, or, as we called it in those days, a calico, with a design of fine blue cross-bars ornamented with tiny baskets of flowers. I thought this lovely, and pined for it for two whole years; but Gertie too liked this garment, and refused to part with it as long as it was possible for her to wear it. There were tucks in the skirt and in the wide sleeves, and these were let out one by one, the pattern thus revealed being distinctly brighter than the remainder of the much-washed fabric, nevertheless my admiration did not diminish. But one day we were playing under the horse-chestnut tree, and Gertie had the happy thought of carrying a number of half-ripe chestnuts, which she had

extracted from their pods by the simple process of stamping on them, in the front of this dress, and the result was a large and grievous brown stain. This was in part removed with salts of lemon, but as soon as the operator discovered that she was erasing the pattern of the frock as well, she desisted from her task, and the result was that the skirt was irretrievably spoilt—the middle breadth being everywhere marred by white streaks or brown smears. Gertie said she did not care how soon I had it, and the nurses insisted that, as I had always been 'moithering' them about it, I ought to think myself in luck for getting it so soon. My mother pointed out that the frock was really quite clean and that the stains did not show under my pinafore—but to me it was the shattering of a dream. I positively hated that print, and was never more rejoiced than when it found its way to the rag-bag.

But the rule of inheritance did not apply to all our frocks, certain of these being purchased in pairs.

Well do I remember the joy of the transition not merely from white to black—which, though exciting in itself, was shadowed by a certain sadness on my mother's face, for the mourning was for our father—but from black to colours. It was shortly after my eighth birthday. We set forth to Maryborough, driving all together on a car in charge of Mrs. Daly. Nellie, who was just seven, was to have a

new dress too, and Aggie came because she could not be left behind. The sides of the car being occupied, she was accommodated with a seat upon 'the well,' a position much coveted by us all, but invariably conceded to the youngest.

Of all delightful vehicles commend me to an Irish outside-car—a private one, I mean, for the seats of the hireling jaunting car are of a slippery and insecure nature—swaying from side to side with a movement slightly dangerous to the uninitiated; the footboard, moreover, has a way of sliding from beneath one's feet in disconcerting fashion when the horse turns a corner or shies at a wayside pig. But the comfortable, well-cushioned family car, the seats of which slope downwards at the back so that it is in a manner impossible to slide off them, the stout railing to which the nervous may cling, the leather aprons, firmly buckled over knees and feet, the bird-like ease with which one appears to cover space, all combine to make a drive on such a car the most delightful mode of progression.

This particular day chanced to be Fair day in Maryborough, and 'town' as Mrs. Brady said, was very full. We had no sooner reached the long rows of cabins, with whitewashed walls and dark moss-grown thatch, which formed what somebody once called the suburbs of Maryborough, than we encountered a variety of carts rattling towards us from the main street. These contained pigs, sheep,

and sometimes a calf or two, the distracted mothers ambling bellowing in the rear. Now it would be an 'ass-car,' well padded with straw, in which an old dame would be seated triumphant in the consciousness of having sold her chickens—an empty churn often towering over her from the rear.

Now a drover would appear, marshalling his flock with a difficulty liable to be increased by the fact of his being more than a little intoxicated. As likely as not he would exchange facetious remarks with Coss, and Mrs. Daly, who liked the sound of her own voice, would intervene with some shrill pleasantry. Gertie always sickened at the sight of a tipsy man, and would clutch my hand in terror; and Aggie, who had most distinct views on etiquette at even the earliest age, would remark that Coss oughtn't to talk to nasty people. When we reached the main street we were obliged to proceed slowly, and the car was instantly surrounded by beggars. Ragged little boys turned catherine wheels in front of us, claiming rewards of halfpence, and one very red-faced old woman positively barred our way.

'Haven't ye e'er a penny for poor owld Rose?' she inquired. 'Dacent, respectable owld Rose. 'Deed an' ye might spare a penny for poor owld Rose, darlints! If the misthress was in it, it isn't a penny she'd be givin' poor owld Rose——'

'Ah, whisht! Don't be moiderin' the childer,' said Coss. 'Where would they get pence for ye? No, but if ye'll make that nose and chin of yours

meet I'll be givin' ye a halfpenny myself. 'Pon me word it's like a pair of nutcrackers they are.'

Apparently this was a feat which the old body found no difficulty in accomplishing, for she achieved it without a moment's delay and then once more extended her grimy hand.

'Ah, get out! That wasn't worth a halfpenny,' said Coss, driving on.

We had watched the performance with horrified interest; and, though relieved at resuming our progress and leaving behind us the crone, whose language was now of a sulphurous description, we were distinctly conscious that Coss had treated her unfairly.

'You did promise her a halfpenny,' said one of us, while Aggie, drumming emphatically with her small feet on the cushion, declared that Coss was cheating.

'Ah, not at all,' said he. 'She's well used to be crackin' her nose and her chin. Sure what else could she be doin', and not a tooth in her head?'

The arrival at the shop, which I will call Brady's, put an end to the discussion. Brady's was by far the most important establishment in the town. You could buy almost anything at Brady's, from a pickaxe to a crinoline. There was a grocery store, an ironmongery department, and a drapery counter, towards which Mrs. Daly now marshalled us. Aggie and Nellie were accommodated with chairs,

while Gertie roamed about the shop, and I, scrambling up behind Nellie, seated myself on the counter.

'So it's coloured material the young ladies are wanting this time?' said Mrs. Brady, bustling up to attend to us.

'It is,' rejoined our nurse, adding: 'Sure, colours is what every one has to come to, no matter what sorrow is on them. Didn't I fill up when I had to leave off me black!'

To 'fill up' was Mrs. Daly's way of announcing that the person of whom she was speaking was on the point of tears.

'Ah-h-h!' said Mrs. Brady.

'Ah-h-h!' echoed Nurse Daly, and thereupon proceeded to pour into her auditor's sympathetic ears the tale of her own widowhood, passing by an easy digression to her brother-in-law-who-lived-in-the-country (this gentleman was invariably thus described, all in a breath), whose condition bordered on distraction as he contemplated the lot of his motherless babes.

Mrs. Brady recalled similar instances of 'feeling' which *she* had known, and our new frocks seemed in danger of being forgotten, until Coss, having made sundry purchases 'in town,' announced his return by the simple process of flogging the window nearest to him with his whip. Old Rose had followed him, and though that 'dacent respectable' old body was entertaining him with her discourse, varied with certain involuntary demonstrations of

her only accomplishment, he was impatient to be gone.

'Here's Mr. Coss back,' said Mrs. Brady. 'Well now, what were ye thinking of for the young ladies' dresses, ma'am?'

'The missus fancied a blue serge,' said Nurse Daly.

'I'm afraid we're out of blue serge,' rejoined Mrs. Brady, who as a rule catered for a different class of customer. 'What would ye say to a nice linsey, Mrs. Daly? We all know what young ladies are about their clothes. I have a very nice grey linsey here—nothing so nice as a grey linsey for young ladies in the schoolroom—grey linsey with a bit of black braid. Mr. Brady!' (hailing her husband distantly) 'that grey linsey there, if ye please.'

Mr. Brady came forward with a roll of the material in question, which he unfolded triumphantly on the counter for our benefit, and of which he subsequently cut off a sufficiency to clothe Gertie and myself.

'You'd rather have something different for Miss Nellie?' queried Mrs. Brady. 'Well, now, I have a lovely thing here—just a remnant—but it'll be the very thing for Miss Nellie. Mr. Brady!'

Mr. Brady turned interrogatively.

'The lilac material, ye know. I don't know what ye call it,' she explained subsequently, 'but it's a very nice thing, Mrs. Daly, ma'am.'

After our grey linseys the material in question seemed to us gorgeous. The ground was lilac, freckled with tiny black spots—suitable no doubt for the Sunday gown of a farmer's wife, but hardly appropriate for a child who was barely seven. But our nurse and Mrs. Brady vied with each other in their admiration. Nellie, whose big blue eyes were only just able to peer over the counter, seemed highly elated, while Gertie and I were inclined to be jealous. But Mrs. Brady assured us that grey linsey was *the* wear for young ladies of our age, and so we watched Nurse Daly complete her purchases with returning content. Black braid, broad and narrow, for trimming; stout crackling grey calico for lining; even whalebones for our ridiculous little bodices—the mere thought of them makes a latter-day parent shudder.

The prospect of the return drive was marred by the fear of encountering 'dacent, respectable owld Rose,' who was, we felt sure, lying in wait to threaten us and Coss, but when we emerged from the shop no Coss was in sight. Having grown tired of waiting, he had driven away to confer with some of his cronies. The main street was still crowded, however. There were tipsy men not a few, cattle, pigs, and many beggars. We clung fearfully to Mrs. Daly's skirts.

'Ye'd best go back into the shop,' said she. 'Stop with Mrs. Brady while I go up the road after the car.'

But even the shop was uncomfortably crowded now. Women with cloaks over their heads were pressing round the grocery counter, and a very cheerful man was in treaty with Mr. Brady over a spade.

'Town is certainly very full to-day,' said Mrs. Brady; and she invited us to go upstairs to her own parlour over the shop to await the return of the car.

We were all lost in admiration of Mrs. Brady's parlour, when, having proceeded us up the narrow stairs, she opened the door and pulled up the Venetian blinds. Yes; there were Venetian blinds; there were also wax flowers and fruit under glass shades on the chimney-piece and in the centre of the table, but the latter ornament was surrounded with neat piles of books; the younger members of the Brady family were well-educated and, indeed, talented. There was also a piano, and Mrs. Brady filled us with joy by raising the lid and placing on the wires within three or four little figures, very elaborately dressed and mounted on bristles; these skipped and twirled when the notes were struck, as though they were dancing.

With a shriek of delight Gertie seated herself on the piano stool and began to play: 'When the day with rosy light'—which was her latest piece—jumping up every now and then in the hope of seeing the effect produced. The rest of us gathered

round enthralled. Mrs. Brady held up Aggie for a minute or two, then deposited her in an armchair.

'I must go back to the shop,' she said; 'we're very busy to-day. You'll excuse me I'm sure, young ladies.'

We said: 'Of course,' but thought Mrs. Brady's withdrawal a lack of politeness on her part, and, moreover, felt slightly unprotected. Even the dancing figures had lost their charm before Mrs. Daly returned.

We accomplished the drive home without any further adventures and were able to look forward to the advent of Mary Hogan, the dressmaker, and to the possession of our new frocks.

Next morning Mary Hogan came, importing a strong odour of turf smoke, and was established in the bath-room—as I have said before, the nurses had a particular affection for sitting in the bath-room—and soon the terrible little garments took shape. They had full bodies which fastened in front—even Nellie's; they had very ample skirts with about four inches of stuff turned in at the top to allow for our growth, and were trimmed round the bottom with several rows of braid; the sleeves were cut 'full long,' to allow for the anticipated extension of our arms, and the necks were made 'easy' for the same reason. I remember the discomfort caused by the friction of a starched and crimped frill against my collar-bone. On the whole we were proud of these frocks, and my mother,

though she looked at them with some disapproval, said they were good enough to be 'tattered through.'

But we had other frocks 'for best,' of a more attractive kind, sometimes actually purchased at 'Manning's,' in Dublin, but often manufactured from skirts of my mother's.

One summer's day we were summoned to her room, to find her installed in her armchair, with a serious expression of countenance, while sundry large boxes were opened before her. They were old-fashioned, flat, black boxes, one of which I remember was called an 'imperial,' and had in former days been strapped on to my grandfather's travelling carriage. These proved to contain a large stock of dresses which had been in her possession before she had gone into mourning for our father. She was still in mourning, but bethought her that something ought to be done with these clothes which had lain by for more than two years.

Mobie was there and one or two other maids, every one had a rather solemn expression, and we ourselves felt slightly awe-struck at the sight of the big, black boxes from which so much magnificence was being unearthed. There was a black velvet, trimmed with a curious black and gold striped embroidery.

'You might take a turn out of that yet, ma'am,' suggested Mobie.

'Oh no;' said mamma quickly. 'I shall never

wear it again—it will be out of fashion by the time —if ever I go out again. But you can unpick it, Bess,' she added.

A rustling grey silk dress was next lifted out from the tray of the imperial. I can see it now. It was a light grey silk, very soft and lustrous, with a narrow black stripe. My mother looked at it critically: 'Hold up the skirt,' she ordered. 'Yes, it is very wide,' she went on. 'I think we could make two frocks for Gertie and Mollie out of that.'

We could hardly believe our ears. Frocks of real silk! Mobie again intervened: 'Sure, maybe it would come in for yourself in a year or two,' she hinted.

'No, no;' said my mother. 'That will do for Gertie and Mollie, I say, for best; and that black silk—it is quite out of fashion anyway—they can have little jackets made of that.'

Black silk jackets! We swelled with importance.

One of the maids now lifted out two shimmering garments, more lovely than anything we had ever seen. One was a pink silk, curiously and elaborately made, and the other was a lilac, trimmed with a light creamy insertion, with narrow black velvet run through it.

'That,' said my mother, looking at it thoughtfully, 'would make nice little evening dresses for Gertie and Mollie.'

'I am afraid there is hardly enough silk in it,' rejoined Mrs. Daly, gazing at the shining folds

appraisingly. 'The gauze is all cut away at the top. There's not near as much stuff in this and the pink as there was in the grey.'

'I got them both in Paris,' said my mother with a little sigh.

'Oh, mamma,' I broke out irrepressibly, 'couldn't Gertie have the lilac and me the pink?'

A pink silk dress had been my dream, even before the days of Mary Catherine. But every one looked rather shocked at this evidence of unseemly greed.

'Mary!' said Miss Dowd warningly.

The maids looked at each other. Only Mobie murmured excusingly: 'The poor child!'

My mother said nothing for a moment, and when she spoke she appeared to ignore my remark.

'You can put away the pink,' she said to the maid. 'It will come in when Miss Nellie and Miss Aggie are old enough to wear colours. And unpick the lilac very carefully, Mrs. Daly. I think there ought to be enough for two frocks—but we shall see.'

Ultimately Mrs. Daly's surmise proved correct: the lilac silk, which might perhaps more justly have been called peach-blossom, for it was shot with the most delicate shade of pink, was only sufficient to make two skirts, which we wore in conjunction with little white blouses, or 'Garibaldis,' as they were called in those days—and black velvet sashes donned for 'going down to dessert.' Very proud we were when we went strutting downstairs when

there were visitors in the house, swishing our new skirts against the balusters all the way for the joy of hearing them rustle.

The grey silks were made up by Mrs. Daly and Miss Hogan into very quaint little garments, with bodice and skirt closely imitating those of grown-up people. We wore them 'for best,' particularly when we went with our mother to call on any of our neighbours. We had odd little black silk jackets, with bell sleeves, and trimmed with jet; the only items in our costume that, according to modern canons, were suitable for our age being Leghorn hats, trimmed with black velvet and bunches of daisies.

How superior we felt when my mother took us thus attired to call on her nearest neighbour, whose small red-headed son was about our own age. He was generally a bold youth, rather disposed to brag and make the most of his position as only son, but our fluttering ribbons, our bell sleeves and our rustling skirts, reduced him on this occasion to awed silence.

'*He* has only got a common little grey suit,' we said to each other, as we commented on the fact afterwards, like the inconsequent little snobs that we were.

The custom of making children's dresses in exact imitation of those of their elders, with the exception of slightly shortening the skirts, was certainly a strange and unintelligent one. The evening dresses

of little girls of ten and twelve were made of most unsuitable materials, and followed the prevailing fashions so closely as to be almost grotesque. How people nowadays would laugh at children who wore grenadine frocks, trimmed with satin and frequently embellished with artificial flowers, the bodices fastening in front, heedless of the unbecoming effect at an age when waists are still large and square, and with a *carré* at the neck which duly displayed their little collar-bones.

I have a vivid recollection of the first occasion on which I donned splendours of this nature. We had been asked to a Christmas party at the house of a friend who lived so far off that we were to sleep the night. When we arrived we found the house in great confusion. It was packed as full as it would hold to begin with, and every one was busy trimming the tree. Dinner was to be half an hour earlier than my mother had anticipated, and she sent her maid in a great hurry to unpack, adding: 'You can dress the children afterwards while I am at dinner.'

'But,' said our hostess, pausing as she had been about to leave my mother's room, 'the children will come down to dinner, won't they? I—somehow I forgot about a meal for the children. Mine have had their tea ages ago, and have been turned out of the schoolroom. My governess is getting ready some of the presents there.'

'But they have never dined late in their lives,'

gasped my mother. 'Couldn't they—couldn't they just have some bread-and-milk in their room?'

But our hostess looked at her helplessly and did not think it could be done. The servants were all so busy.

'Don't you think they'd like to come down?' she added persuasively.

Gertie was delighted at the prospect. I was divided between my natural shyness and a kind of fearful joy—this would be something to tell the little ones when we returned.

We dressed ourselves in our party frocks, which were of white grenadine, piped with blue satin, and duly cut square in front; we had white silk stockings and white satin shoes, and little one-buttoned white kid gloves.

Down we sailed, hand-in-hand, behind our mother, almost tumbling over her spreading watered-silk train, with its beautiful lace, to find the drawing-room full of grown-up strangers. None of the children of the house were present, we had not yet seen any of them, except a fleeting glimpse of the youngest son, who was then of an age to have his top-knot held in place with a pink ribbon. We could not improve our acquaintance with him on that occasion, as, with the exception of the pink ribbon in question, he was entirely unclothed, having probably just escaped from his tub.

My short-lived elation vanished when I discovered

that, in addition to this disappointment, I was separated by the whole length of the big dining-room table, not only from my mother but from Gertie. The butler had not anticipated our presence, and chairs were therefore squeezed in for us where a vacancy could be found.

I was no sooner seated between two strange gentlemen than problems in etiquette presented themselves to my small mind. Was it the right thing to keep on one's gloves during dinner? I was so small and my neighbours were so large that I could not see what my mother was doing. The lady opposite was slowly removing hers; our hostess, however, whose hands had been severely scratched by her operations with the tree, kept them covered. My subsequent humiliation connected with this episode enables me to recall the precise appearance of those gloves, which were of a very pale shade of lavender, with black stitchings; the wrist, of two button length, of course (nobody dreamt of anything else in those days), was pinked round the edge. Not being able to take my cue from my mother, I thought I could not do better than imitate my hostess, and therefore kept my ridiculous little hands encased in their uncomfortable white kid wrappings from soup to grapes.

My mother, who caught an occasional glimpse of me, often laughed as she recalled the prominent part played by the hands of both her offspring on this occasion, for though Gertie had taken off her

gloves, she considered it necessary to keep her rather red little paws tightly clasped on the table at every moment when they were not absolutely in use, while the vision of my gloved fingers struggling with a knife and fork, which seemed much too big for them, added to her discomfort.

We had never assisted at a grown-up dinner in our lives, as has been said, and after a time found the multiplicity of dishes a trifle embarrassing; nevertheless, as our nursery and schoolroom code strictly enjoined the acceptance of all which might be offered to us, we steadily waded through the entire menu, and suffered our glasses to be filled one after the other. In those days the wines varied with each course, and I found myself with sherry, hock, and champagne all at my elbow. I had the sense to confine myself to champagne and to refuse a second glass of this, though my neighbour on the right—a bluff, hearty old gentleman, endued with more good-nature than good sense—officiously desired the butler to serve me again. It was at this point that I was startled by my hostess's horrified glance at the neighbour in question.

'Really,' she ejaculated, 'I think she'd better not!' and her gaze shifted to the brimming beakers which already flanked my plate.

Shall I ever forget my agony of blushes, and how I longed for courage to explain to her that I had not touched either of the glasses in question, and that the champagne I had already consumed had

been, for the most part, 'fluff'—as a hospitable Irish footman is said to have explained to a guest whose glass he had hastened to replenish: 'Sure, that's all fluff!'

But I was of course tongue-tied, and felt ready to sink under the table whenever our hostess glanced in my direction, feeling sure that she was on the look-out for signs of intoxication on my part.

But I now come to my culminating 'foo-paw'—indiscretions were so designated in our family since the hurried confession of a beloved old housemaid who acknowledged a certain breakage by calling it a *faux pas*. The phrase as thus applied was sufficiently quaint, but her pronunciation particularly caught my mother's fancy, and the expression soon became current amongst us.

The dear lady of the house had, as has been shown, forgotten to cater for her two small guests, and when a dish of snipe appeared there were, in consequence, not enough to go round. Nevertheless, true to my principles, I helped myself to one of the succulent little birds, and Gertie would have done the same, had not my mother managed to convey a glance of warning. In consequence of what must have appeared unseemly greed on my part, our host, who was rather fond of snipe, was deprived of the dainty in question. I had a view of the momentary surprise and discomfiture on his kind face as he watched me struggling with a

huge knife and fork, which pursued the snipe's slippery carcase over my plate, my gloves rendering the carving of it particularly difficult.

A dawning sense of my solecism began to stir in me, and my neighbour's remark did not tend to put me at my ease: 'Well, well, it's a wonder you were able to eat that big dinner. 'Pon my word I was admiring you. You put away as much as myself!'

I must own that when I slid down from my chair I was aware that the blue satin band of my grenadine frock was uncomfortably tight. However, this did not trouble me, when, after what seemed an interminable interval of waiting, we at last entered the room where the tree awaited us in all its splendour, and where we were joyfully greeted by the children of the house. It was a huge tree, and there were presents for every one, little and big, even including the servants indoors and out.

It was a very merry party and we thoroughly enjoyed it. I don't know at what time we can have gone to bed that night, for the proceedings ended with a magic lantern display, the passage of each slide being accompanied by humorous and appropriate remarks. The youngest son of the house, now duly clothed, sat on his mother's knee, immediately in front of me. She had feared that the usual presentment of monstrous giants and other horrors might terrify the little fellow, but his shrill

laughter dominated that of the others. Presently a particularly hideous ogre loomed on the white sheet, and opening a wide mouth, champed with monstrous and very prominent teeth. There was a moment's awed silence; even the bigger children did not like it; I, who was one of the lesser, by no means liked it. But all at once the little boy in front of me announced in his peculiarly distinct tones: 'That's the very mimage of Mr. ——!' mentioning the name of the gentleman who was conducting the performance for our benefit.

'Hush, dear!' murmured his mother, but the little boy emphatically repeated his remark: 'It's the very mimage, isn't it?'

Delighted giggles acknowledged the justice of his observation, for no doubt there was a certain likeness between the ogre and the personage who was so kindly ministering to our amusement.

The slide in question was hastily withdrawn, but I think many of the children in the audience enjoyed this incident more than any other part of the entertainment.

CHAPTER XIII

IVY HOME

NELLIE and Aggie generally paired off during recreation time and had a rural retreat of their own a stone's throw from 'Long Island'—we elders were forbidden, under pain of their most severe displeasure, to visit it without leave.

'Ivy Home,' as they called it, really did seem to be a kind of fairy bower. This little clearing in the shrubbery was hidden from the eyes of the grown-up world, much like 'Long Island,' but was more in the shade and completely overgrown with ivy. Not only were the ground and the adjacent tree-trunks carpeted and draped with it, but a variety of old stumps grew in the place, round which it climbed and twined till they assumed all manner of fanciful shapes—here a couch, there a table, yonder stools and chairs. Here the little ones used to betake themselves, while Gertie and I scampered off to 'Long Island'; here they had their private games and discussions, and read their books; here, too, they first inaugurated the great literary enterprise which made our childish lives busy and happy—for here was published *The Ivy Home Magazine* and *The Ivy Home Library*.

Miss Dowd had made an end of Gertie's verbal romances, which she considered nonsensical. She kept us fully occupied with games and with the reading of interesting books adapted to our age. It was during the reign of her successor, Miss Canning, that we returned to composition, and the two younger ones were the first to throw these compositions into literary form. I came upon them one day sitting cross-legged at the end of the nursery corridor, each with a copy-book on her lap, the open pages of which she was diligently scrubbing with soap and water and a nail-brush. No persuasion, however, would induce either of them to reveal why they were doing this, but I could see for myself that the copy-books were old ones, and that they were removing the traces of their own former toils.

A few days later, however, they confessed that they were writing stories 'out of their heads' on the rough surface of the paper they had thus prepared. I would give much to possess one of these manuscripts now, written as they were in large round hand, and with somewhat blunt pencils. I was very soon inspired to imitate their example, but Gertie's talents never ran to written composition. Being the eldest sister, and sensible for her years, she became more and more of a companion to my mother; moreover, since Miss Dowd's trenchant criticisms she had come to feel ashamed of her own juvenile efforts; but we three juniors

were never happier than when we were at work with pencil and paper, for ink was not available either at 'Ivy Home' or 'Long Island.'

Leaving Gertie, who was generally too much absorbed in her book to notice my defection, in sole possession of 'Long Island,' I would steal down behind the laurels to 'Ivy Home,' where I was graciously received and invited to take possession of one of the ivy-covered stumps. I would then read out my latest effort and would listen to theirs. One day Nellie was struck by an idea. Why should not we have a magazine of our own, at which we could work every week, and which could be 'published' on half-holiday afternoons? The plan was adopted with acclamation. I was to be the editor and to supply poems, Nellie was to contribute the serial, and Aggie short stories. The first serial was called, I remember, *Ah Sing Fu, or The Tail of a Chinese Mandarin.* We thought the play on words exquisitely humorous.

My first poem began:

'When Eve went forth from Paradise
The whole world lay before her eyes,'

and it proceeded to describe Eve's impressions on picking up a small dead bird:

'This bird is dead, it draws not breath,
Then tell me, Adam, what is death?'

I cannot recall Adam's precise reply, but I remember the words occurring:

'when the short span
Is o'er, which God assigns to man.'

which would seem to show that I had a rather extensive vocabulary for a child of nine or ten. It ended, I remember, by Adam and Eve agreeing to resign themselves to the inevitable, and wandering away in affectionate mood, hand-in-hand.

My labours as an editor were considerably complicated by Nellie's getting bored with her serials and always wanting to start a fresh one.

Ah Sing Fu never got beyond the first number. I do not now remember Aggie's short stories, though she was the first to break away from the childish vein in which our original attempts were conceived.

Though *The Ivy Home Magazine* continued to appear intermittently, it was soon practically superseded by a series of separate stories which each wrote on her own account, but which were read out, as before, on holiday afternoons. We all had pseudonyms, mine being 'Miriam Steurt.' The surname was really intended to be pronounced *Stewart,* though spelt in this original manner. Nellie was 'Ethel Seaward,' while Aggie was 'Alice Syrell.' I have now a list before me of *The Ivy Home Library,* inaugurated a few years later, but including much of our earlier work.

My own first story was called *Alfy, or The Fairy*

Seraphine, and it was followed by *Mabel, or The Nameless One who found a Name*, and *Evandale Manor, or Stella's Christmas*.

There is a long list of stories by Miriam Steurt labelled 'out of print,' which I presume must have been either destroyed, or possibly erased in the manner described, for I, too, had recourse to the nail-brush when pennies came short. Amongst the titles of these lost masterpieces I see: *A Few Ideas, True Joy, The Courtship of Dicky* (in verse), while at the end of the list duly appears the announcement—'Now in Press: *The Mocking Bird*, by Alice Syrell; *The Legend of the Flowers*, by Ethel Seaward; and *Isa and her Fairy Friends*, by Miriam Steurt'; while the only productions which seemed to be 'Now Ready' were the aforesaid *Mabel, or the Nameless One who Found a Name*, and *Ida, or If You Like You may Read Me*.

I have a distinct recollection of this last-named story, written out by Nellie very neatly in a little manuscript book, bound in red morocco, which someone had given her for her birthday; it was ornamented with initial letters, and illustrated, as usual, by the author. It concerned itself with the fortunes of the good and charming Ida, while a certain unkind and unmannerly little girl, whose name I forget, played the part of villain. I was rather concerned to discover that Nellie's present-

ment of this young person on one particular page appeared to be rather pretty than otherwise.

'Why, Nellie,' I cried, 'you've made the horrid thing look quite pretty.'

'She was rather pretty,' said Nellie, with her head on one side.

'Oh,' I protested, much scandalised, 'but she was so horrid!'

In my companion volume, *Mabel,* I had been careful to make the bad little girl, Leonora, look as hideous as possible.

'She could have been nasty and pretty all the same,' rejoined Nellie firmly.

'But you said her hair was red,' I reminded her after a pause. (My Leonora had carroty hair.)

'Redd*ish;*' said Nellie, 'just auburn. Lots of people have auburn hair.'

'And green eyes,' I continued, 'and—and a turn-up nose.'

Leonora possessed features of this description.

'Her eyes were greeny-grey,' said Nellie; 'and her nose was *cocked. My* nose is cocked,' she added, rather fiercely.

I withdrew from the discussion baffled, and feeling convinced that Nellie's first departure from orthodoxy would be followed by an even worse lapse, and that she would make the naughty girl repent and become quite good in the end. Which foreboding of mine was, in fact, eventually realised.

My own principles at that time were somewhat

akin to those of Hogarth. I liked the good to be good and to go on getting better, and the bad to become worse and worse until overtaken by dire retribution and discomfiture.

I remember *True Joy,* which was written, I think at the age of eight, on a pennyworth of note-paper. It was a romance which Gertie alone was considered old enough to appreciate. There was a grown-up hero with curly black hair, an overturned pony-carriage from which he rescued the heroine, who was appropriately dressed for her morning drive in a lilac silk dress with four flounces, and a hat with a white feather. She carried a jewelled whip, and wore a gold bracelet on each arm.

I must own I should much like to be able to recall the work entitled *A Few Ideas,* but I have no recollection of it whatever. *Mabel, or the Nameless One who Found a Name,* is, however, still in my possession. The opening paragraph runs thus:

> 'In a handsome villa, situated on the side of a mountain In Kent, lived an old Gentleman and Lady called Sir William Wilkins and his lady. They possessed one only child, a daughter named Leonora . . . . I will now describe her. Round her bullet head hung limp carroty locks. Her eyes were small and of a blue-grey colour, her face was red, her mouth was large, her nose was snub, and altogether she was far from handsome. Her disposition will develop itself in the course of my story.'

When one reads, on the other hand, a little further on, the description of the golden-haired, blue-eyed Mabel, there can be no doubt from the outset as to which is to play the part of heroine and which of villain.

I had always had an immense admiration for golden hair and blue eyes, and used indeed to pray fervently that I might myself become possessed of them. I used to run to the glass after these earnest petitions and be much disappointed to find that eyes and hair remained just as brown as before.

There is not much originality about this story, which is largely inspired by *Les Petites Filles Modèles*, mingled with reminiscences of Shuzzey's romances.

The following sentence :—

> 'After partaking of some cake (the nature of which was curious and uncertain) and drinking some rather peculiar wine, Sir William and his relations took their departure'—

would seem to recall the Pecksniffian table, while here and there a grandiloquent attempt at scene-painting is obviously inspired by Scott.

> 'An exclamation of delight burst from Mabel's lips as she viewed the beautiful country. The scenery was wild and majestic. There was something in its grandeur that made Mabel's poetic heart bound with delight. The old grey Castle

stood proundly on a slight emminence, and stretching far away behind it was a wood through whose lofty branches could be seen faintly glimmering the azure waters of the lake.'

Nevertheless this tale had a plot of its own, for the Nameless One not only discovered a name but a title—a courtesy one to be sure, and the sceptical might be inclined to doubt even that, as it accrued to her on the discovery of her being 'the long-lost niece of the Countess of Sutton.'

All that my own private dreams could picture, combined with the luscious descriptions of the abodes of fashion and luxury, as quoted by Shuzzey from the *Family Herald*, are in a manner hashed up for the delectation of Mabel, and we leave her flitting from the arms of her Aunt the Countess to the shoulder of her Uncle the Earl, 'the tender, cherished flower of the old stock.'

I had no idea until I re-read this effusion the other day, that I had taken such an interest in dress in my childhood, for our own frocks as schoolroom children were, as has been said, of the plainest nature, and excessively ugly. Contrasted with our brown and dark grey linseys, our black aprons and elastic-sided boots, Mabel's apparel was simply gorgeous. Even when she is still under Leonora's heel she appears in 'a white alpaca dress with three flounces trimmed with pink round the bottom, an overskirt and jacket of the same,

trimmed with pink, a straw hat trimmed with pink and a white feather.' Leonora was, on the contrary, dressed in bright green (which was a colour I hated), 'with enormous buttons and a wide sash, and an enormous scarlet bow on her red hair.'

Coloured pictures of them decorate this page, Mabel's legs being torn off, though Leonora's duly appear with frilled trousers reaching to her ankles, and very high-heeled green shoes.

We had not been taught drawing, and found it easier to give a side view of our characters, their legs always appearing one immediately behind the other, like the legs of figures on an Egyptian frieze. This necessity of depicting our personages *en profile* once caused me great confusion. One of my creations was described as 'a stout, burly man,' and in the accompanying sketch I had endeavoured to do justice to his proportions. Our Mademoiselle contemplated him with a pursed lip! 'Vous savez, Mary,' she said, 'il a un terrible pantalon!'

In all Mabel's portraits her single eye is phenomenally large, while the mouth is so microscopic that it gives no indication of the 'two rows of pearly teeth' with which we always endowed our heroines, until, a few years later, 'J.' advised us to omit this detail.

'*Don't* you see,' she would say, in her sing-song northern voice, 'that if the girl had *more* than two rows of teeth she would be a monstrosity, and if she had less—well, really I wouldn't go into it!'

Struck by the justice of her argument, we regretfully omitted this minute analysis.

Mabel's dress for a party was 'pure white. She had a silk underskirt and a white tulle overskirt, looped up with bows of white satin ribbon. She had a pearl necklace on and a green sprig in her hair.' Her uncle, being struck by her appearance, murmured 'as he took one of her tiny, white-gloved hands in his:

'As fair as a lily was my lovely one,
And like a white rosebud with beauty she shone.'

The story of *Mabel* is in many ways a revelation to me, and I think I must differ from my sisters in that in my case the child does not seem to have been mother to the woman.

The abrupt breaking-off of Nellie's tales, which I, as Editor of the *Ivy Home Magazine,* so much deplored, was generally caused by the imperative desire to describe some scene or phase of nature which had caught her fancy, and which could not be made to fit into *Ah Sing Fu* or any such story. Her chief work, *Ida,* was cast aside, though almost finished, because the unexpected opening of a seldom-used garden door revealed an unkempt corner behind the shrubbery of which we had never hitherto caught a glimpse. Rank grasses and weeds grew there, tall daisies and poppies—it must certainly give access to some fairy country; therefore *Ida* was thrown overboard and a tale of enchantment begun, prefaced with so long a

description of a weird and fantastic land, that before the heroine had come upon the scene a new mood seized the author.

This mingled love of nature and the mystic has borne fruit in my sister Elinor's three volumes of poems: *Footsteps of the Gods; Pastorals;* and *The Wild Orchard.*

The same remark applies to Aggie. 'Alice Syrell' is distinctly the juvenile forerunner of Agnes Egerton Castle. As I said before, she was the first to put away from her in literature the things of a child, and I can recall a story written in French when she was between thirteen and fourteen, which would have been a remarkable achievement for any young author.

But by what freak of fate should 'Miriam Steurt' merge into 'M. E. Francis'? The creator of the blue-blooded Mabel, the literary wallower in a luxuriousness only comparable to that which surrounded the Lady Flabella—by what ironical destiny should she devote herself to chronicling the humble lives of Dorset Tabitha and Lancashire Tummas?

Can I, after all, have missed my vocation? Is my rightful muse still disporting herself on the 'emminence' where I, too, was wont to dally, and is it some impish will-o'-the wisp that has led me downwards to the Dorset 'lotment and the Irish bog?

CHAPTER XIV

HIGH FESTIVALS

Does anyone nowadays wake up on Christmas morning with the bliss which is the portion of children? I have had many happy days in my life, and particularly happy Christmases, but the peculiar, delirious ecstacy which was mine when my years were still numbered by a single figure cannot, I think, return in later life.

My sister, Mrs. Egerton Castle, the 'Aggie' of these pages, has described what I may call the more sacred and blessed side of this high festival as we knew it in our childhood, in *A Sentimental Garden* and *A Little House in War-Time;* the sense of having the 'Christ-Child,' as dear Hans Andersen calls Him—in our very midst; our innocent belief that the joy of welcoming Him was shared by His guileless dumb creatures and even by inanimate nature.

But I will touch on the feast as it appeared to us from a mundane point of view. There were the presents to begin with. For weeks beforehand we had been busy in the preparation of them. There was not much cash at our disposal, and we used to

go about with foreheads furrowed by the effort of solving the problem how to make our funds go as far as possible. Nurses and governesses reassuringly told us that our mamma would much prefer some article which we had ourselves fashioned to any bought object; and therefore we expended our pennies in the purchase of materials. Red velvet and gold braid were much favoured by us all as being most gorgeous in effect, while the more wealthy among us added a certain number of gold beads which could be festooned round the sachet or pincushion in loops of various sizes, on thread which was uniformly brittle. Others of us, having discovered that Mrs. Brady sold a certain narrow lace (save the mark!) at the price of one halfpenny a yard, laid in a stock of that; and once I had the original idea of buying a threepenny bottle of scent, with which I impregnated the cottonwool destined to form the stuffing of my sachet. We generally, under such circumstances, petitioned my mother for a little of her scent, 'for a particular purpose,' we would say mysteriously, and she was too discreet to ask questions.

But on this occasion I was proud, and expended my superfluous wealth on a small bottle of greenish glass, adorned with a coloured picture of flowers unknown to any botanist. My sachet was made of pink silk, oblong in shape, and festooned with gold beads after the manner already described. Alas, I had not patience to wait until the wadding was

quite dry before I thrust it between the pink folds, with the result that the colour of the silk ran and presented a mottled appearance which much dismayed me. Nevertheless, consoled by Mobie, who declared it was watered silk now, and there was nothing in the world so handsome as that, and being, moreover, buoyed up with the thought that if the sachet was mottled the scent was uncommonly strong, I fastened up the precious object in tissue paper and put it away among my own handkerchiefs to await Christmas. But I was disconcerted when one day, as I took my place at luncheon next my mother, she sniffed and looked inquiringly at me.

'My dear child, why do you smell of patchouli? Have you scent on your handkerchief?'

'No—no,' I said doubtfully, for the use of the sachet could hardly be called scent.

'Well, something certainly smells of patchouli,' rejoined my mother, 'and there is nothing in the world I detest so much.'

The other children looked mysterious, but nothing more was said. I inwardly decided that this strong perfume must have been evoked by the sachet having been shut up wet—there was no mention of patchouli on the bottle, which was labelled '*Milles Fleurs*'—and resolved to air my sachet well before presenting it.

My mother received our offerings with her usual appearance of joyful satisfaction, remarking of a

lop-sided pincushion of Gertie's that it was beautifully made and would fit nicely in her dressing-case when she was travelling. My sachet was also highly commended, while a split walnut bag of Nellie's, the silk lining of which she had hemmed with immense pains, was declared to be most suitable for a thimble case. Aggie's gift was quite original. It was a doll very neatly dressed in a red skirt, black apron, and white bodice, both its hands being firmly fastened to an extremely minute pincushion trimmed with the inevitable gold beads, into which at least three pins might possibly be stuck. One of our governesses had helped her with this latter adjunct, but she was clever with her fingers even at a very early age, and had dressed the doll largely, if not entirely, by herself.

As we grew older our presents were of a more ambitious description. I remember a red silk crochet purse with a steel fastener, made all by myself, and a dreadful knitted mat which the entire family combined to produce. It was of variegated wool, green and purple, and its chief peculiarity consisted in the fact that you had first to knit, then undo, and finally to sew together skeins of the unravelled yarn. The mat, when completed, presented the appearance of a miniature spinach bed, with four enormous lilac flowers, resembling artichoke blossoms more than anything else, firmly embedded in its crinkled rim. The wool had been a very expensive item, and the card-

board covered with black velvet had also made large inroads into our available capital. We expected a peculiarly appreciative reception of our joint-offering.

My dear mother had a very tell-tale face, and the four pairs of eyes bracketed on it on this occasion were somewhat baffled by its expression. In truth, it looked quite sufficiently surprised to please us—but was the surprise of that joyful order which we had anticipated?

'Don't you like it?' one of us asked hesitatingly.

She hastened to declare that she liked it very much. Indeed, that she thought it beautfully made and had been, in fact, wondering how on earth we had managed it.

We proudly explained all about the knitting and the ravelling which made it crinkly, and the sewing together again, and my mother expressed more and more interest and appreciation. But there was a queer sort of twinkle in her eye, nevertheless, and a subsequent remark of hers staggered us.

'I am wondering where I shall put it?' she said.

'Oh, mamma,' we exclaimed in chorus, 'the drawing-room.'

The 'scheme' of the drawing-room was white and gold, and it was upholstered in blue. She looked doubtful.

'Or the *libery*,' suggested one of the younger ones.

'Perhaps I could keep it here,' said my mother, who was still in her bedroom; 'let me see, what is it for, exactly?'

'For putting something on,' we told her. 'A bookstand or—or a statue, or anything like that. Hardly anyone would see it here,' we added mournfully.

Then she would put it in the library, my mother assured us. She thought it would look very nice on one of the tables—a flowerpot could stand on it.

We agreed to this proposal and used to take great pains for some time to clear away the books and photograph frames in front of our work of art, so that a full view of its beauties could be afforded to all comers. But things did creep round it again, and the gardener unfortunately watered it so copiously one day in conjunction with the plant it was supporting, that it had to be taken away to be dried. Somehow or other we forgot about it after that, though it was with a shock of painful surprise that I subsequently came upon it in some of the back premises. We were even more grieved to discover once, when a certain drawer in my mother's big bureau had accidentally been left open, that all, all our presents were stowed away there. All the red velvet pincushions, the sachets, my mottled one among the number—even the walnut thimble-cover and the Swiss doll. We almost tearfully reproached her.

'Don't you *ever* use *any* of them?' we asked.

She hastened to assure us that she took the pincushions by turns in her dressing-case, and the other pretty things were put away for greater safety. We might have been consoled by this, but for an unfortunate lapse, which she subsequently much regretted.

'I've such a lot of them now,' she said, 'I wonder if you would like to have any of them back?'

I don't think anybody answered. We were really too much hurt to speak, and her efforts to retrieve her error only made matters worse. Her explanation that she liked to use her own big pincushion, and that it seemed a pity to have so many things put by, only seemed to turn the dagger in the wound.

Parents and what were called 'superiors' in those days, did not perhaps enter into children's feelings as much as they do now. Or it may be that, without being quite such a Spartan as Rosamund's mother, they thought it impossible to begin too early to instil common sense into their little ones. And though it may have occasionally resulted in hurt feelings, I don't know that the plan was a bad one.

But the giving of presents was only a small part of the joy of Christmas. There was the receiving of them. In our secret hearts I think we defied the adage and found it more blessed to receive than to give.

My own children liked to have their presents put at the end of their beds, but we had a special wish that offerings intended for us should be fastened to the handle of our bedroom doors.

It began, of course, with our tying up our stockings, but it was suggested to us later on that, as a tribute to that common sense to which I have before alluded, it would be better to have *one* good present each than a variety of trumpery little things, which were really of no use to anyone. Gertie readily agreed; the rest of us followed suit, though I must own to a secret yearning for the 'trumpery things' of which the authorities spoke so slightingly. Still, it was nice to hear a big satisfactory parcel bumping against the door when one was in bed and supposed to be asleep, and then to wake in the morning and to speculate as to whether it was yet permissible to creep from under the blankets and investigate. They were nice, those 'good presents'—large dolls; well-bound and beautifully-illustrated books; paint-boxes and writing-cases; and once—oh joy of joys!—a miniature dressing-case, complete with fittings, and even containing two dreadful little bottles of scent and hair-oil, which I think my mother must have overlooked.

One of the joys peculiar to Christmas Day was dining late. We used to feel very proud when, arrayed in our best, we sallied downstairs to wait in the drawing-room, like real grown-ups, until

dinner was announced, and solemnly prepared to do full justice to the occasion. I remember one of the little ones emphatically desiring Mobie to tie her sash nice and loose, as she intended to eat a big dinner. Even Baby, installed in his high chair by my mother's side, had a little of everything that was going, including a small allowance of champagne. How everyone laughed when, on the first Christmas that he was thus promoted, he set down his glass and, looking seriously round the table, remarked with an approving hiccough: 'I *like* champagne.'

I think it was on that occasion that he endeavoured to reassure Aggie when she cried as usual at sight of the flames leaping round the plum pudding. This she invariably did, to our great indignation, as it resulted in their being allowed to die down instead of being vigorously stirred up as each one helped herself. It was then that Baby looked across at his little sister and observed with condescending superiority: 'It's only 'moke, Aggie.'

Aggie, however, who was an excessively nervous child, continued to cry and to hide her face until the blue flames were extinguished; and the Christmas harmony was only restored by the appearance of dessert, with a big cake and crackers.

When one considers what children were allowed to eat in those days one is stricken with amazement. Turkey and plum pudding would seem to be already a fairly tall order for children of tender

years; but when we remember that, added to these solid viands, there were mince pies, Christmas cake, black with richness and heavy with almond paste, sweets and biscuits innumerable, and champagne to top up with, one positively gasps.

It was considered necessary for children to have a stimulant of some kind at dinner-time then. We each had a little glass of beer; even Baby, when too young to partake of this beverage, had an allowance of sherry and water, while Aggie's drink was 'half-and-half,' which she called 'porter-beer.'

We elders were allowed half a glass of wine when we came down to dessert. Gertie had sherry and I had port—imagine what one would think of a modern youngster thus refreshing itself!

The crackers were an enormous joy, and we appreciated them in a more thoroughgoing fashion than children do, I think, nowadays. Not only did we read the mottoes, and wear the caps which they contained, but we treasured the outer pictures and even the coloured gelatine.

Happy and replete, we adjourned to the drawing-room, where we played cards and began the first chapter of a new Waverley novel. We knew all the titles by heart, and used often to speculate as to which of the beautifully-bound green books would be taken out of the long shelf for our delight. One Christmas my mother amused herself and tantalised us by making us guess which she had chosen.

'It begins with B, and ends with F,' she said.

Little Nellie, with eyes blazing with excitement, exclaimed 'Beef!'

Whereupon we elders hastened in a superior way to join in my mother's laughter, though we were still far from divining the enigma.

'As if there could be a *Wavering* novel called "Beef"!' I exclaimed.

And then it was my turn to be laughed at. However, all confusion was forgotten when *The Black Dwarf* was opened; and the crowning joy of the blissful day was going to bed at half-past nine, which seemed to us an unearthly hour.

Our first act on waking on Easter Sunday was to ascertain whether or no the sun were dancing on the wall, which feat some of our nursery-maids had assured us was appropriate to the occasion and a harbinger of good luck.

Looking back on those bright spring mornings, it seems to me that the sun always did dance on our nursery walls, and not infrequently on the ceiling, for as soon as the shutters were opened and the blinds drawn the rays would fall full on the looking-glass in the window.

Everyone was very cheerful on Easter morning. Mobie, who had fasted rigorously the whole of Lent, in spite of her seventy odd years, would inaugurate proceedings by breaking two raw eggs into her tea—a ceremony which much interested us. Then Macky would generally send up our breakfast eggs dyed bright colours, red and yellow,

so that Easter Sunday was a very special 'Negg-day,' as Aggie called it. (It is funny how popular this phrase is among children, probably because of the variation of the article—*an* egg becomes a negg.) We were also occasionally allowed a little honey on this great day.

Though we had not fasted during Lent, our allowance of milk and butter had been docked, and pious nurses and governesses constantly reminded us that it was a time for mortification, so it was a point of honour to eschew anything that savoured of undue relaxation. But to-day relaxation was not only permissible but commendable. When we came back from church and ensconced ourselves each in a comfortable chair with a story-book—having fasted from fiction for forty whole days—each provided, moreover, with a large chocolate egg from which to regale herself, we felt that our well-earned enjoyment was entirely appropriate.

We had holidays at Midsummer when Johnny came home.

The first day after his arrival was always deliriously happy. He was five years older than Gertie, and we all looked up to him immensely—at least during the early days of his vacation. We listened with a kind of fearful joy to his tales of doings at school, and allowed him meekly to order us about and to dictate the form of amusement which he would condescend to share with us. He had a tool-box and occupied himself very happily

at one time in shaping a toy gun from wood commandeered from Mr. Buggy.

We used to hold the wood while he sawed and planed, though we were extremely nervous as to possible danger to our fingers.

But one day he was presented with a real gun —a little single-barrelled muzzle-loader, and from that moment put away childish playthings. How snubbed I felt when I presented him with the flat object which he had fashioned with so much care, inviting him to 'go out shooting,' which was a breathless and dangerous form of indoor amusement entailing much tearing up and down stairs, opening and shutting doors and dashing along passages. We girls were generally his quarry, and used to imitate the sounds presumably made by the particular wild animal he was supposed to be chasing. But Johnny handed back the fictitious weapon with great disdain.

'Do you think I would look at a toy gun *now*, when I have a real one?' he rejoined.

He and William used to sally forth each day to shoot rabbits, and we were politely informed that our company was not wanted. We consoled ourselves by building hay houses, wandering about the woods, and working intermittently in our gardens, and on the whole found that we were quite as happy, for our big brother required a certain amount of living up to, and it was rather nice to play at what one liked oneself.

Of all the delectable amusements alluded to above, the building of hay houses was what appealed to us most. If the hayfield chanced to be near the house we were allowed to disport ourselves there, unhampered by nurse or governess. When I was a child the mowing-machine was not much used in that part of Ireland, and the grass was cut by hand. The whirr with which we are now familiar, accompanied by the heavy footfall of the horses, may be pleasant enough, but cannot compare to my mind with the leisurely sweep of the scythe or the cheerful sound of whetting, interspersed by various jocular remarks from one mower to another. There seemed to be an army of lanky, loose-limbed, good-natured-looking workers employed in our fields—from the father of a family, respectfully addressed by us all as Mr. Whalan or Mr. Coyle, according to the code of etiquette insisted upon by our nurses, to the irresponsible Micks and Bills and Pats, who had just been promoted from ninepence to a shilling. Freckle-faced Micky, who was in later times destined to be Baby's henchman, walked about carrying his father's whet-stone, and was always ready, in the intervals of his labours, to show us a chaffinch's nest or a baby rabbit.

With what joy did we scamper across the field, gathering up armfuls of the new-cut grass with its cool, moist, sweet-smelling ends, and clusters of clover. Choosing a likely spot, we would lay the

foundation of our house with these early gleanings, and work feverishly in collecting more, until we had built up a circular structure higher on the sunny side and with a gap in the middle to serve as doorway. Within we arranged the hay in seats or couches and then thankfully cast ourselves down with crimson faces and very hot little bodies, to breathe at ease, a favourite book by our side and a portion of strawberries, cherries, or sometimes an orange for each. How did we come to find oranges at hay-time? I don't know, but I can still recall the delightful sensation of lying back against the warm hay and slowly sucking the contents of a particularly juicy one, through a small hole punctured with my little finger. I remember endeavouring to convince the others of the excellence of this method, which not only was cleaner, but made the orange last twice as long. Nevertheless I think I was reduced in the end to the ignoble and inelegant expedient of turning the orange inside out.

Patrick's Day was also a high festival for us. There was a great deal of stir and bustle about Patrick's Day. We were given a half-holiday on the Eve, in order to make Patrick's crosses for ourselves, the servants, and the poor children of the neighbourhood.

I wonder if the custom of wearing such crosses is still kept up in Ireland as it used to be in my youth?

How happy and busy we were as we sat round the schoolroom table, each armed with a tumbler, a sheet of cardboard, a pencil, a needle and cotton, and innumerable scraps of ribbon and silk. You turned your tumbler upside down on the cardboard, and were thus enabled to mark off a perfect circle with your pencil. You then cut out as many of these circles as your cardboard would admit of, with a rather blunt pair of scissors, and fell enthusiastically to work sewing strips of ribbon of contrasting colour across and across it. You finished it off with a rosette as near the centre as you could manage, and a loop at the top, in which you inserted two pins—one to fasten it to the coat or dress of the prospective wearer, and one to attach thereto the indispensable bunch of shamrock.

When we had used up all our ribbons, we spread out the results of our labours on a tray, and went proudly round the house, allowing the servants each to choose a Patrick's cross from among them. Any which remained over we distributed next morning on our way to Mass; reserving two for Maggie and Mary Coss at the lodge, and two for the schoolmaster's little girls, and tossing the remainder haphazard into the little grubby hands which were extended to us from the roadside.

The servants were allowed punch on Patrick's Day. We used to hear them discussing it beforehand, and talking of 'drowning their shamrocks.'

One day, when I was a very little girl, I became

quite envious of an enjoyment which I was not allowed to share, and was naughty and deceitful enough to exaggerate a slight cold, and make it a pretext for staying upstairs. Shuzzey (it was in Shuzzey's time) undressed me in severe silence, and then went along the corridor to the bath-room, where the nurses' supper was served. By-and-by dear old Mobie came creaking in, in her soft shoes, to see if I were asleep.

'Are you drowning your shamrock, Mobie?' I asked.

'I am, alannah,' replied Mobie.

'I'd like to drown *my* shamrock,' I announced mournfully.

'Well, maybe a little taste would do your cold good,' rejoined weak-minded Mobie.

She disappeared, and presently came back with a little doll's tumbler which she had filled from her glass.

I extracted the withered and crumpled remnants of my shamrock from beneath my pillow, and duly dipped it into the steaming compound—then I sipped.

Oh, horrid shock and disillusion! I choked and spluttered, and burst into tears of vexation.

'It's horrid, Mobie!' I said, pushing away the glass and looking vengefully at her.

'Why, then, it's elegant,' said Mobie, 'and it'll do your cold all the good in the world.'

I lay down without speaking, and with a con-

science that was sorely ill at ease, for I knew very well that I had no cold to speak of. I felt, in fact, that my disappointment was just retribution.

The others came up to bed in a hilarious state. They had had such fun, they said.

'*We* drowned our shamrocks!' cried Gertie. 'I had port this time.'

'And we had some comfits afterwards!' said one of the little ones.

'And mamma told us a story,' said another.

They gathered round my bed with eyes that I felt to be disapproving. I coughed and closed my eyes, anxious, in spite of my recent pricks of conscience, to keep up the fiction of indisposition.

'That's a regular forced cough,' said Gertie, scornfully. 'Mamma said it wouldn't have done you any harm to come down. *You* might have drowned your shamrock too.'

This was too much; I forgot all about my remorse and sat upright.

'I did drown my shamrock!' I cried. 'I had punch. Mobie gave me a tumbler of punch.'

I did not mention the fact that the tumbler was an inch and a half high, and the sensation I caused was great enough to satisfy me. I lay down again, inwardly reflecting that it was not necessary to tell them how nasty it had been.

But greater even than our excitement in preparing for Patrick's Day was that which animated us at the approach of Hallow-e'en.

Hallow-e'en, or All-Hallows Eve, as it is called on this side of the Channel, falls, as everyone knows, on the 31st day of October, and is associated with many rites and ceremonies which savour largely of superstition. Kale-cannon is a dish dedicated to Hallow-e'en, just as pancakes are appropriate to Shrove Tuesday. It is a mixture of cabbage and potatoes, with or without the addition of parsley, and its main feature consists of the fact of a ring being hidden somewhere in the sticky compound. We liked the ring part, and the lucky one to whose share it fell was generally elated, and quite prepared to 'marry within the year' in spite of her tender age.

And then there was the making of apple candles by cutting and trimming slices of the fruit in oblong shape, a piece of filbert doing duty as wick and flaring quite handsomely when set alight. Somebody dared you to bite the lighted candle in two, and swallow the wick while still burning, and you were considered to have accomplished this feat if the wick were alight when you took it into your mouth. It was a game which entailed much squealing and laughter. Bobbing for apples was not encouraged by the Authorities, as being a wet and messy performance, for the apples were supposed to float in water and to be picked out with the teeth. But we gathered breathlessly round the nurse or maid who told our fortunes in lead. This, having been melted in an iron ladle, was poured

through the handle of a door-key into a basin of water, and assumed all manner of strange shapes. Now it would be a castle with an arched gateway and tiny towers.

'You'll be marrying a lord, Miss Gertie,' Nurse Daly would say.

And sometimes it would assume the shape of a purse, and the owner would be told she was coming in for a large fortune. More frequently it made birds' nests or nondescript animals which were named horses or dogs according to the fancy of the fortune-teller, who would announce the prospective arrival of 'a beautiful pony' or 'a lovely hound.'

Then there were other still more mysterious rites. The top bar of the nursery grate having been swept clean, nuts were set down in twos and threes to roast side by side. The couples represented sweethearts, while the centre nut of three was an emblem of some lady of the neighbourhood who was supposed to be unable to make up her mind as to which of two admirers she would finally select. The servants would invade the nursery when it came to this part of the performance, and leaning over the guard, would put couples of their acquaintance to the test, and not infrequently, I fancy, would try their own fate in this simple fashion. If the nuts burnt side by side, the course of true love was likely to run smooth; if, on the contrary, one bounced away, it betokened that the match was off, while the central lady not

infrequently leapt into the flames rather than accept the attentions of either of her lovers; or, on the other hand, remained high and dry while they both hopped away from her. Many jocular comments were exchanged above our heads.

'God help ye, Maggie, he's gone off with himself!'

'I knew she'd never look at ould Tim Brady.'

'Glory be to goodness if Nanny isn't left with that poor omadhaun, Bill Kay, after all.'

'Maybe she wouldn't stop with him, though! She will not; she's off with herself now.'

And then would ensue roars of laughter which we only half comprehended.

We soon gathered the drift of what was going on, however, for we were precocious children—so precocious, in fact, that, one Hallow-e'en, when I was between nine and ten years old, I set down three nuts on my own account. Wild excitement ensued, both grown-ups and children hazarding various guesses as to whom I could have in my mind. But I pursed my lips, and shook my head, and assumed an air of great mystery and importance.

'Tell us, anyway, if the middle one is a lady or a gentleman,' someone said at last.

'Oh, a lady!' I rejoined, in scandalised tones —intimating 'far be it from me to place any member of my sex in the position of being jilted.'

Guessing was renewed, without success, however, until Gertie, struck by a sudden inspiration, shot

a forefinger into the middle of my pinafore, and shrieked: 'Yourself!'

'Yes!' I exclaimed, in the same ecstatic note, and I looked expectantly round.

But the announcement was received with a distinct frost.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed my mother, who chanced to be present on this occasion, and she gave me a glance that was half astonished and half severe. Our governess looked down her nose, and said that she thought in any case it was a foolish game for little girls to play at; even dear Mobie stood with her forefinger on her lip, which was her way when puzzled and slightly perturbed, and shook her head at me.

'And who, pray, are the gentlemen?' some grown-up voice inquired sarcastically.

But I was sufficiently discouraged by the reception of my first admission, and was not going to be caught again. It was only in the privacy of our own room that evening that I relieved Gertie's curiosity by mentioning the names of the only two little boys I knew. I don't remember which, as typified by the nut, jumped into the fire first, but I can only say that I married neither.

But the most thrilling test of fate was that known as 'Four Plates.' The proceedings were as follows:—When the table had been cleared after the last meal of the day, a plate was set at each corner. In the centre of one was a wedding-ring,

in another a piece of black cloth, a third contained water, and the fourth should properly have held a sinister little heap of earth.

The players are blindfolded one by one, outside the door, and during his or her absence from the room the position of the plates is changed. The blindfolded one is then led round the table, once, twice, or three times, according to the fancy of his pilot, after which he is abandoned to his own devices and makes as many groping touches as he chooses, finally plunging his hand into one of the plates. The wedding-ring speaks for itself, as does indeed the heap of earth; the black cloth betokened a religious vocation, while the water foretold that the chooser would be forced to go across the sea. This custom, superstitious if you like, dates evidently from very ancient days, though in more modern times the 'crossing of the sea' was held to portend emigration and not exile.

My mother, who did not really approve of this superstitious amusement, only tolerated it on condition that the heap of earth, betokening an early grave, should be replaced by a scrap of white muslin, indicating the cap of an old maid. We really dreaded this latter fate much more than the other, for, though we were not morbid children, we should have felt a certain sense of romance in our impending doom, whereas the fate of an old maid was simply unthinkable.

CHAPTER XV

SCHOOL

My mother's bed was an heirloom, a huge four-poster with carved mahogany pillars and green curtains. There was an ottoman at the end of this bed, and it used to be our great joy to climb on this ottoman, and thence on to the carved foot-board, where, after balancing ourselves for a moment or two, we swung over and dropped on to the bed at our mother's feet. Indeed, there was plenty of room for us to sit all five in a row without touching her, for the bed was as big as a small room. She usually breakfasted in bed, and we spent a delightful half-hour with her there, during the interval between our own breakfast and lessons. Heedless of the fact that we had just disposed of large bowls of bread-and-milk or porridge, we were ready to be regaled with spoonfuls of her egg, scraps of toast, and occasional sips of tea, as alternatives to conversation. One morning Gertie, who had of late began to claim certain privileges owing to her seniority and precocious good sense, went into our mother's room before the rest of us were ready, and when we joined her we found her, not in her usual perch on the bed, but standing by the

hearth with an expression of subdued excitement and importance, dashed with a something else, something dubious and possibly a little fearful.

'What are you talking about?' we at once queried, in the intervals of scaling the end of the bed.

'We have been talking about something rather serious,' rejoined my mother. 'In fact, we have been talking about school. Gertie is nearly twelve years old—and'—here she was interrupted by a wail from me. Gertie was my cherished mate, almost my twin, so inseparable had we hitherto been.

'Oh, mamma, *don't* send Gertie to school.'

'Wait a bit,' said my mother. 'I was going to say you are nearly ten, Mollie, and Nelly is eight. It is time for you *all* to go to school.'

This was a new idea, and not altogether unpleasing. It opened up vistas of novelty and possible adventure. To go to school all together would not be so bad. But then to go away from mamma!

'Are we going to school in England?' one of us asked, rather dolefully.

My mother herself had been to school in England.

'Not yet,' rejoined she, adding that she would possibly send us later on, when we were a little older. This school was not far from Dublin, and she would be able to see us often. Besides, we should be coming home for the holidays—long holidays in the summer, and a fortnight at

Christmas. It was a large house, with beautiful grounds, and she felt quite sure we should be very happy there. In any case she knew we would be sensible about it. It was good for girls to go to school and make friends and learn more accomplishments than it was possible to procure for us in the heart of the country.

'And now that dear Miss J. is obliged to leave us,' she continued, 'I think it is better for you three big ones to go to school. I will have a nursery governess for Aggie and Baby.'

We three big ones (who were, after all, not so very big), immediately responded to the appeal to our wisdom and good sense, and remarked, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that we quite saw our mother's point, and that of course we ought to go.

There was a certain amount of pleasant importance in watching the preparation of our wardrobes. New underclothing, new boots and shoes, some perfectly frightful black alpaca pinafores which the school authorities had declared indispensable, replacing the sprigged muslin of ordinary wear. Our 'uniforms' of maroon-coloured cashmere, trimmed with black braid, and a white muslin for 'summer best,' were also fashioned at home, from patterns supplied by the establishment we were shortly to enter. Daly and Mary Hogan made them according to their usual formula for Nellie and myself, with baggy little

full bodices; but as Gertie was now shooting up into a tall slim lassie, Miss Hogan averred that it would be a shame to hide her lovely figure, and therefore the upper portion of her uniform was made skin-tight—much to the subsequent scandal of the school authorities, who rectified the worldly appearance of this garment by an outer attachment of flapping folds, which effectually concealed poor Gertie's budding curves.

Our effects were duly packed in the old-fashioned black trunks, studded with brass nails, which had previously accompanied us on our flittings to Dublin, and one day, a dismal day in spite of all efforts to be 'sensible,' we took our departure, accompanied by our mother, while Aggie and Baby saw us off from the portico. Aggie was crying, and so was Nellie, for these two had hitherto been as inseparable as Gertie and I were. Baby looked very solemn and rather white; but my mother was very cheerful. She beguiled the journey with many anecdotes of her own schooldays, coupled with plans for the holidays.

When we arrived at our new home, however, and had been conducted down sundry whitewashed passages smelling of beeswax and new plaster, into a miraculously neat parlour, silence suddenly fell upon her, and when, after a brief conversation with the Superioress, she rose to go, she gave a little gasp which almost sounded like a sob.

'Come, come,' said our new protectress,

soothingly. '*You* mustn't give way, dear Mrs. Sweetman. You must show these dear children how brave you are.'

My mother made no remark; in fact, as we speedily discovered, she was incapable of answering. She took us in her arms and hugged us. Her cheeks were very hot, and her dear lips quivered. The almost pleasurable excitement which, in the bustle of arrival, had replaced our previous sense of forlornness, now gave way, in turn, to absolute consternation. That *mamma* should cry because we were going to school; that she, whom we had always looked on as uniting the wisdom of Minerva with the firmness of Juno, should thus give way, awoke in us a sense of dire tragedy. We had never doubted her love for us, but somehow it had not hitherto occurred to us that she would feel the separation so much. *We* were told that it would be foolish to cry about going to school, since we knew that our education had to be completed, and had always known that this process was to take place at school. And now here was mamma crying about it! We were overwhelmed with the disaster, and felt all our little world tumbling about our ears. But almost before we had time to break into subdued lamentations my mother was gone. We heard the wheels of her cab crunching the gravel while we were yet fumbling for our pocket-handkerchiefs.

'Come, dear children,' said our new mistress

kindly, 'you must not begin your school life with tears. You will be very happy with companions of your own age, and besides that you will have an older girl to look after you until you are quite at home. I will send for them now.'

In a few minutes our new guardians arrived: I say 'guardians' advisedly, for it was the habit of the little ones to call the elder girls, in whose charge they were, their angels. I fancy Nellie and I must have shared one, for I can only remember the entrance of two of these superior beings into that trim school parlour. One was called Maria, and a report was current that she was nearly twenty, and had remained at school in what was positively a fossilised condition, because, being an orphan, her relatives had not yet decided what to do with her. She was a stout and rather plain-looking girl, but so good-natured that we were tempted to forget her incredible age and the sense that she belonged to quite another order of beings from ourselves. Gertie was committed to her special care; while I, and probably Nellie, were handed over to a brown-eyed girl of sixteen, Kate C, who undertook to look after us with a certain grave condescension which filled us with respect. No doubt in these days she would have hailed us as 'kiddies'; the odious word had not then been invented, but her tone and manner conveyed the impression that she considered us very small indeed, though she was willing to overlook the fact. We noticed with awe

that both these young ladies had their hair 'up' and wore gloves, this last item being, as we afterwards discovered, considered indispensable to a visit to the parlour.

After a few minutes' genteel conversation, they rose and curtsied to the Superioress—a proceeding which we imitated as well as we could—and marched us away along interminable miles of passages to be shown our places in dormitory and refectory, and the cubicles in which we were to keep our outdoor boots and clothes.

With what sinking hearts we trod those immense passages, the chill of which struck through us on that cold spring day. The building had been recently added to, and the walls were scarcely dry. To the end of my life I shall recall the peculiar smell of plaster and whitewash which seemed to overpower the more agreeable odour of beeswax.

'This is your alcove,' said Kate, as we entered the dormitory, and I looked in amazement at the long row of white curtained beds. 'Twenty minutes after the bell rings in the morning you must be washed and dressed, your curtains will be drawn back, and you must go into the middle of the room to do your hair.'

I have never been able to discover the reason for this cryptic rule, though I daresay it was intended to ensure careful brushing of the hair under the auspices of an attendant. My own hair was short, owing to a recent illness, and the procedure cost

me no trouble; but poor little Nellie, whose locks were of unusual length and thickness, and who had always been accustomed to the ministrations of a nurse, found it almost impossible to obey the regulation.

A few days later I plunged from behind my curtains on recognising her tones in a sudden outburst of howls which echoed down the long room, and found her standing with her brush hopelessly entangled in her thick yellow tresses, while the attendant was endeavouring to persuade her that a great girl of her age ought not to behave like a baby.

'What time does the bell ring in the morning?' we asked, and were told six o'clock.

We were accustomed to rise at eight, and there was at first a sense of pleasing importance in getting up thus amazingly early, to feel that before the workmen's bell rang at home we were opening our eyes to the cheerful light of an already advanced morning. But I must own the satisfaction was short-lived.

'Your number will be thirty, Mary,' proceeded the monitor, 'and yours, Elinor, twenty-four.'

Gertie's was fifty-seven. We were each presented with a napkin ring inscribed with these figures, and moreover with a sunbonnet which we were to wear during play-hours. They were lilac print sunbonnets, rather frayed and washed out, and in fact closely resembling the headgear of Old Molly, who

weeded the gravel paths at home. We looked at them with amazement, mingled, I must own, with a strong dash of disgust, and this feeling returned when we discovered that it would be our duty to wash our own knives, forks, and spoons after each meal, and dry them on the table-napkin, which was to last us, for ordinary purposes, throughout the week. I leave you to imagine the condition of those napkins when Saturday arrived.

The evening meal was in progress when we entered the refectory and took our places, for the time being, beside our protectresses—though they were careful to point out that, as they themselves belonged to the first division and we would probably all of us form part of the third, we should be moved to different tables on the morrow. Tea was served to us ready mixed with milk and sugar out of large jugs. Its taste was indescribable, owing to the fact of its having presumably been stewed, according to the French custom, by those in authority in the kitchen. We were each supplied with a most excellent crisp roll and a pat of deliciously fresh butter, which, however, we found quite insufficient for our wants. There were also slices of cold meat of a curious prismatic hue at which we wondered, though, as we subsequently discovered, it did not affect the taste. I presume this was owing to the fact of saltpetre or something similar having been used as a preservative.

Gertie had recently been accustomed to late

dinner with my mother, and no doubt remembered the roast chicken at which she had many times sneered, calling it 'the inevitable,' while we younger ones sighed for the steaming stirabout which smelt so good when it came hot off the bath-room fire, or the bread-and-milk at which we had so often turned up our noses.

Breakfast next morning was a repetition of the evening meal, minus the meat; while dinner consisted of either a stew or roast joint, served by the one elder girl who sat at each table. We were helped in rotation, beginning with the youngest, a mark of politeness which we failed to appreciate when we discovered that we were obliged to wait until everyone was served, so that all might begin simultaneously. The little ones watched gravy congealing on their plates and vegetables growing cold, with a sense of mingled dismay and injury. All these rules had been introduced by the first mistress, an ascetic-looking person who presumably thought it good for little people to curb a possible inclination to greed. There were three puddings in that establishment, on which the cook rang the changes with unvarying regularity—'Black Jack,' a kind of treacle dumpling that in course of time I grew rather to like; 'Dog in the Blanket,' our name for roly-poly, made with raisins instead of jam; and curds of surpassing sourness, which we at first found impossible to swallow, but presently preferred to either of the other dishes.

We very soon got into the school routine, but my anguish was great when I discovered that I was to be separated from Gertie, whose attainments and superior diligence justified her inclusion in a higher class. We were apart even during play-hours, as Nellie and I were relegated to the third 'cours,' while she was in the second. On Sunday afternoons all sisters were allowed to walk together; but I am bound to say that I did not enjoy the 'sisters' half-hour,' as Gertie soon developed what seemed to us supernatural goodness and wisdom, while school life had the contrary effect on us, her juniors. We were generally in 'scrapes,' and our weekly record of marks was decidedly mediocre. All the rules of the establishment were survivals of the original French codes, and the marks were summed up each week in the following manner. The girl who had been entirely diligent and satisfactory would receive 'très bien' for everything. Passable, or middling, was rendered as 'bien'; while naughty or troublesome children were let down with 'assez bien.' It was darkly whispered that once or twice in the annals of the school a girl's name had been coupled with the dread word 'mal'—but that had heralded expulsion.

Week by week the formula was unvarying as far as we were concerned:—

'Gertrude Sweetman.—Conduct: très bien. Diligence: très bien. Order: très bien.'

'Mary Sweetman.—Conduct: bien. Diligence: bien. Order: bien.'

'Elinor Sweetman. — Conduct: assez bien. Diligence: bien. Order: assez bien.'

The verdict was invariably pronounced *assay bienne* by our little American mistress, who would cast a severe look through her horn-rimmed spectacles at the culprit the while.

Gertie, who was beginning to look quite grown-up in her long-skirted, full bodiced uniform, and whose curly hair was now tucked away into a net, thought it incumbent on her to live up to these signs of superiority, and to do credit to the good conduct badge which it was her privilege to wear. Moreover, she felt it something of a disgrace that one of her sisters (myself) should be looked on in the light of a mischievous imp, while the other's obstinate fits provoked surprise and a kind of awe in her companions. She had possibly also been told to improve the occasion by bestowing on us sage advice during the sisters' half-hour. Certain it is that she did so employ it, and that Nellie and I, in consequence, failed to enjoy the sedate stroll incidental to these occasions, less than we might have done had we been free to scamper about with Gertie as we used to do at home, or to regale her with anecdotes of our doings during the weekly separation. As a matter of fact Nellie was still practically a baby. Her health suffered from unaccustomed conditions, and the tasks of dressing

and undressing herself, brushing her thick hair, lacing her boots, etc., presented real and immense difficulties to her—difficulties incomprehensible to her companions, who had been accustomed to shift for themselves at a very early age. She felt, naturally, aggrieved, on being scolded by the authorities for being so slow over her toilet, while *she* knew that it was quite impossible for arms so short as hers to fasten things which buttoned down the back, or to lace up boots tidily when there was such a bewildering number of holes. She would stand stock still, with a scarlet face and flashing eyes, while her schoolmates giggled.

The result was ' assez bienne ' for conduct which was considered recalcitrant.

My own peccadilloes were more reprehensible, for they were unprovoked and voluntary.

My class-room was at the very end of a long passage, and as our lessons terminated before those of the elder girls we juniors used to be piloted in single file to the play-room, hearing, as we passed the array of closed doors, the murmuring voices of our companions who were still at their tasks. The doors of the class-rooms each possessed a panel of glass at the top, and though these were high over my head I found I could jump up and, clinging a moment to the framework, peer downwards at the occupants of the room within. The teacher sat with her back to the door; the girls on benches opposite to her; when my head momentarily darkened the

window they would look up, whereupon I would grimace at them and drop before the mistress had discovered the cause of the unseemly and apparently inexplicable mirth which ensued. It was long before this trick was discovered, as I always happened to be walking demurely in the procession of juniors when our pilot turned her head.

But on one occasion the class-room lecturer was too quick for me, and looked round while I was still performing antics at the panel.

Another prank of mine was creeping unperceived on all-fours from my place at the end of the class behind my companions, and pinching them or muttering jesting comments on their answers to the instructress.

I really think I deserved 'assez bien' or even 'mal' for this wilful naughtiness, but by some good luck I managed to escape all penalties, though I was not cured of my impishness until a certain Madame Thérèse, a dear old Belgian, took me in hand, reasoning with me so sweetly and gently that I was quite ashamed of my past offences, while she made it impossible for me to relapse into them by promising me that if I would try to be good for 'von leetle' week she would give me a 'récompense.' I felt myself incapable of disappointing such generosity.

I fell into more serious trouble on one occasion, when I really had no intention of being naughty. It chanced that the word 'barque' came in our

dictation lesson, and as most of my companions spelt it with a 'k,' the American mistress before mentioned lost patience over their stupidity, and treated them to a harangue, in her rather strident tones, on the advisability of using their wits, pointing out that, as the lesson was concerned with neither a dog nor a tree, but with the sea—which she called the ocean—they might have seen for themselves the silliness of their mistake. While she was thus inveighing I amused myself by scribbling the following doggerel on a loose sheet of my copy-book:—

'My little barque did sail upon the ocean,
And as it sailed it made a great commotion.
For who should be in it but little Madame B.,
Who had never before been on such a rough sea.'

I crumpled up the paper and passed it to my neighbour, who, after having read it, transferred it to hers, and thus, amid covert smiles, it went the round of the class.

Poor little Madame B. grew more and more incensed at the inattentiveness and tittering of her pupils, but the cause was not discovered at the time. Some days later, however, I was sent for by the first mistress, of whom I was much afraid, who handed me the crumpled piece of paper on which I had scrawled my lines, and asked me in an awful voice if it was not I who had written them. I confessed at once, expecting to be dismissed with a reprimand

for encouraging my companions to waste their time, but found to my alarm that my case was considered so serious that it would have to be referred to head-quarters. I was to proceed to the room of the Superioress at four that afternoon.

Oh, how miserable I was during the long hours that ensued. Visions of awful chastisements hovered over me—worst of all, the dread of expulsion, and a broken heart to my mother in consequence of my disgrace. I could eat no dinner, and when our 'goûter' was served at half-past three I could not even look at the 'bread-and-scrape,' as we termed the thin layer of jam which helped down the thick slice of bread forming our afternoon refreshment. We generally made jokes about this meal, computing the number of gooseberries allotted to each; this informal competition was conducted something after the manner of a donkey race, the least successful winning. But the fact that on this particular occasion the winner proved triumphantly that only a gooseberry and a-half adorned her bread failed to cheer me. I sat quaking in a corner, buttoning the gloves which were indispensable to the coming interview, with a sinking heart. I could hardly stand when at last I found myself in the presence of the kind old lady who represented for us all power and authority.

Madame E. stood on her right, 'like an accusing angel,' as I afterwards said, and my luckless doggerel lay on the table. I found that it was not

my idleness that was in question, or the fact that I had incited my companions to be inattentive, but that I had been guilty of a very serious want of respect to a person set over me, not only by the wishes of the authorities and of my dear mother, but by the will of Providence. My lapse began to assume the nature of a crime, in my own eyes at least, and the depth of my consternation and contrition was such as to soften the hearts of my judges. All penalties were remitted on condition of my making a public apology to the lady whom I had treated with such irreverence. I came away from the Council Chamber in a chastened mood, but not without a sense of importance, and on the following morning, after two or three false starts, stood up in my place and stammered out my apology. Poor little Madame B. had not, I think, been prepared for this sequel, and her hurried murmur: 'Very well, my dear, we'll say no more about it,' seemed to me something of an anti-climax. But there was an expression in her little worried face which struck me with fresh remorse—quite a different kind of remorse from that which had previously actuated me. It had not hitherto occurred to me that Madame B., whom we often thought so cross, and at whom we laughed so frequently, could be hurt by anything we did; yet here was Madame B. looking distinctly hurt, and it was I—naughty, silly Number Thirty—who had hurt her.

My behaviour towards her was, in consequence,

quite exemplary for some time, so much so that my classmates began to sneer at me and to accuse me of trying to curry favour with her. After this I was obliged in self-defence to be occasionally pert, and to check the efforts I had hitherto made to please her, being conscious all the time of the unworthiness of this particular form of human respect.

The discovery that I could write verses made me rather popular with the elder girls, who were prone to have 'cracks' or 'crazes' for some particular mistress or companion, and who would conceive a desire of having a poem written in her honour. An excited girl would waylay me in the passage, or murmur in my ear during the progress of a game: 'Do write some poetry on Madame So-and-so,' or 'Rose' or 'Mary,' as the case might be.

Thereupon, highly elated, if a little embarrassed, I would compose and copy out a verse or two about the divinity in question.

I remember being much troubled over one effort, 'On Madame E.,' the first mistress, who, as a matter of fact, I did not particularly admire. I duly eulogised her marble pallor, and called her tall, angular figure 'willowy'; but after that the fount of inspiration ran dry.

'Do say something about her eyes, Mary,' pleaded her disciple. 'She has such beautiful dark eyes.'

I had not myself been struck by the beauty of Madame E.'s eyes, having indeed frequently

quailed beneath the severity of their glance, but thus adjured, I felt it incumbent on me to grind out a tribute of spurious admiration. I wrote mendaciously:

'I see those orbs so like a dove's,
Full of fire and full of love.'

The devotee was satisfied, but I was not.

'I think that's lovely,' she said.

'The only thing is,' said I doubtfully, 'dove's doesn't exactly rhyme to love. There oughtn't to be an "s."'

'Then take out the "s",' cried the other triumphantly, 'that will make it all right.'

I obeyed, and the concluding couplet now ran:—

'I see those orbs, so like a dove,
Full of fire, full of love.'

'You do say dove-like orbs, you know,' said the girl, as she carried off her prize. But I still felt there was something queer about it.

Whether this effusion also found its way to head-quarters or not I cannot say; but I was sent for some time afterwards, and requested not to indulge this particular form of talent. I was told it was a dangerous gift, and that, moreover, until I had learnt the rules of composition, it entailed a foolish waste of time. I was advised, nevertheless, to endeavour to improve myself, not only in studying the style of those authors with which we were permitted to make acquaintance, but to strive after

correctness, both in the writing of tasks and in the letters which I sent home.

It was a terrible moment for us all three when we discovered that these letters were not only read, but amended, before being permitted to reach our mother. Even Gertie's docility was not proof against this unexpected strain. She had written in the informal way to which we had always been accustomed, asking sundry questions, and making such remarks as occurred to her. What was her horror when her own missive was handed back to her with divers alterations, and she was requested to make a fair copy of the whole. Poor Gertie! She had written: 'I am glad Mrs. So-and-so is better since she came back from Paris, I am sure the change did her good.' Thus did she find the last phrase: 'I rejoice that she has benefited by her short sojourn in that delightful city.'

Worse was to come. She had incautiously stated: 'It is very cold now—it's lucky you sent our warm clothes.' The neat little Italian hand that had corrected her page had crossed out that sentence in its entirety, and replaced it as follows: 'Many thanks, dear mother, for so kindly providing us with warm clothing—most seasonable now when winter is approaching.'

'Oh, Madame, don't make me put that!' cried Gertie. 'Mamma will laugh so. She hates our letters to be bookish. And of course she always gives us warm clothes, and will think it so queer of

us to thank her. And we never call her "mother."'

But it was all of no avail. The corrected letter had to go, while Nellie and I sent equally stilted productions, detailing sundry items of information about our proficiency in lessons and other matters supposed to be of interest to our mother. Knowing her somewhat sarcastic turn of mind and hatred of every form of artificiality, the thought of her surprise and possible mockery was anguish to us. We were greatly relieved, therefore, when, during the following week, we were told in faintly regretful accents that we might write home as we chose, and that, except for errors in spelling, the letters would be forwarded uncorrected.

As a matter of fact, this concession was made at my mother's request, for our poor little grandiloquent productions had been so evidently doctored as to call forth not only amusement, but a considerable amount of indignation.

Gertie's allusion to the approach of winter, and my mother's recollection of the long, newly-whitewashed passages had, however, aroused anxiety on her part, and she despatched, by the same post which had brought the surmised request to the Reverend Mother, a packet of 'woollies' for us. 'Woollies' were not then so universally worn as now; with the exception of our short flannel petticoats, our underwear was of linen or nainsook. Our jackets were warmly lined, but we had dis-

carded the spencers of nursery days. Only old ladies, we thought, wore knitted jackets and little shawls. We were much taken aback, therefore, to find that our mother had provided each with a sleeveless jacket of brown wool edged with violet, and that these old-maidish garments were supplemented with a square headpiece to match, to be put on corner-wise, the knitted violet strings being supposed to tie under our chins. An enclosed letter from my mother informed us that we were to wear these in the passages, to protect ourselves from draughts. I suppose that these nondescript objects were the only available garments that my mother could buy at Mrs. Brady's establishment. Not David Copperfield's placard could have produced more misery in its wearer than did the prospect of parading in this fantastic garb before seventy giggling girls create in us. Gertie heroically obeyed the order, and I still have a vision of her pacing towards the refectory with her flat woollen cap confining her chestnut locks. I cannot remember what Nellie did, but after one purgatorial pilgrimage from dormitory to chapel I managed to forget mine, or to find it too hot or too uncomfortable to be worn on subsequent occasions. Gertie, having lived down the giggles of her companions, declared that she found hers very comfortable, but I think Nellie must have followed my evil example, for we both suffered severely from the cold that winter. I developed a hacking cough,

while her poor little hands were covered by immense chilblains, most of which broke and had to be dressed in the infirmary. We used to break the ice in our water-jugs in the morning, and as our sponges were sometimes too firmly frozen to use, we should have been dirty, as well as cold, had it not been for an occasional hot bath. Those were Spartan days you must remember, only a little less Spartan than those earlier times when children used to be carried into the open air to be dipped into the river, or in a vat in the brewhouse. We all had chilblains on our feet, which caused us acute agony after the recreation hour, when we were obliged to play active games to circulate our blood. We hated these games, which seemed to us senseless, particularly as they were accompanied by a chanted jargon supposed to be French. Most of these pastimes were indeed imported. There was one, called 'notre âne,' which we rather enjoyed, as we were enabled to pause in the interminable dancing round, holding on to our companions' hands—carefully gloved by order—so as to simulate the appearance which the remarkable donkey presented in the imaginary attire with which we endowed him.

'Un bonnet sur la tête,' was one line. After singing it we all clutched our heads.

'Il a des lunettes bleues,' was another. We designated our own eyes, then our companions'—that was a great joke. The refrain was:

'Et des souliers lilas, lilas
Et des souliers lilas.'

During this we frantically clutched each other's hands once more, and pranced round. This ditty was at least intelligible, but there was another which I detested, and which seemed to me, as no doubt it was, the purest gibberish.

It began: 'Celai-e, celai-e, celai, celai, cela.' I have never been able to make out what it and the ensuing lines were supposed to mean, but we chanted it breathlessly while we circled round and round, six times from left to right, and six times from right to left—a teacher or monitor watching us carefully the while, to make sure that we all did sing, whether we possessed voices or not.

One day, being nearly frantic between boredom and chilblains, I stoutly declared that I could not sing, and, after having been twice called to order without result, I was relegated to a little pantry, opening off the refectory (where the third cours had recreation during wet weather), a degradation which I was supposed to feel deeply. However, I was filled with nothing but mischievous glee at being able to rest my tingling feet and to look about me. Our dinner had taken place, and I observed two immense dishes of broken bread, which had presumably been removed from each girl's place and carefully set aside.

'There'll be bread pudding to-morrow, girls,' I whispered, when I was at length summoned from

my penitential retreat, and sure enough there was.

One day we were summoned to the parlour, and having hastily changed into our best uniforms and donned our gloves, we entered very demurely to find —oh! joy of joys—our mother waiting for us! How we threw ourselves into her arms, how we laughed and chattered nineteen to the dozen in our efforts to ask questions and to tell our own news at once. After the first raptures of greeting, our mother looked at us with a somewhat perplexed expression. She told us afterwards that we all seemed to her as if we had just come out of hospital. Gertie, who was growing fast, missed the abundance of wholesome food to which she had been accustomed, and, besides being pale and lank, wore one arm in a sling. An inquiry elicited that she had two gathered fingers, one of which would have to be lanced. My cough was of a noisy and persistent description, while poor little Nellie could hardly hobble on account of the chilblains on her feet, and had one hand swathed in bandages. However, we all seemed jolly enough and could not understand why our mother listened to us with such a startled look.

'My dear Mollie,' she said at last, 'what are ta-a-a-bleaux?'

'Don't you know?' I returned. 'Ta-a-a-bleaux vivongs. We are going to have them for the great holiday.'

'A great manny of the girls are goin' to act in them,' chimed in little Nellie.

My mother looked from one to the other and then burst out: 'Children, what dreadful accents you've got. How did you learn to talk like that? You mustn't say ta-a-a-bleaux, you must say tableaux.'

'But they all say ta-a-a-bleaux here,' I protested.

My mother pinched her lips, but said no more. Our mispronunciation of French might have been overlooked, though, as there were French and Belgian teachers, it seemed incomprehensible, but the flat brogue which we had so unexpectedly developed was the last straw.

Not long afterwards we were summoned to the dormitory and there solemnly dressed for an unlooked-for outing. It was a bitterly cold day, and we were much discomfited on being forced to don two white starched petticoats instead of one, while our artistic sense was outraged at having to wear blue serge jackets over our horrible and voluminous maroon uniforms, instead of the frocks which matched.

Much amazed, we were marshalled into the presence of the Superioress, and were gravely informed by her that we were going away.

'We are not going to be expelled!' faltered Gertie. 'What have we done?'

'Oh no, my dear, not expelled, but——' here the poor little old lady swallowed; 'your mother considers it better for you to go home.'

We revived again. Since our mother was a fellow-culprit there was evidently no harm in going home. Nevertheless, they had been kind to us at the school, and they were hurt at our going away, and we were not to be allowed to say good-bye to our companions, lest our sudden departure might unsettle their minds. We were affectionate children, and felt depressed as we emerged into the hall where Mrs. Daly was waiting for us.

All during that long, horribly cold journey we pondered over the sudden proceeding, and suffered increasing pangs of remorse as we thought what Kate C. would say, and Rose L., and the other girls of whom we had been fond, when they found we had vanished without a word of farewell.

I can smile now at the appearance we must have presented when we hobbled one after another into that railway carriage—staggering bundles of parti-coloured clothes — Gertie's sling and Nellie's bandages well in evidence, while my cough shook me from head to foot. Mrs. Daly, according to her wont, paid little attention to us, but I remember a kind old lady taking stock of our appearance over the top of her newspaper. Her eyes, after roaming from one tallowy face to the other, finally rested on me, and observing that I was ineffectually endeavouring to strangle my cough by stuffing my handkerchief into my mouth—which was another pretty habit I had recently acquired—she began to

fumble feverishly in her reticule, and finally produced a peppermint drop.

'Try that, my dear child,' she remarked. 'Perhaps it will stop that most distressing cough.'

But peppermint had quite the contrary effect, and the ensuing paroxysm was so violent as to call forth the characteristic remonstrances of Mrs. Daly.

'I declare I never heard such a cough, Miss Mollie. Ye must be forcin' it!'

The journey came to an end at last, and our spirits revived when we found Coss and the beloved old roomy carriage waiting for us at the station. The friendly porters commented on our growth, and wished us welcome home. And oh, what joy when we reached home at last, and the door was thrown open, and our mamma and the little ones rushed out into the hall!

But later that evening the cloud descended again.

'Do you know,' said my mother triumphantly, 'you are never going back!'

Once again we were simultaneously overtaken by that odd complexity of emotion which had assailed us on first being bidden to prepare to depart. Never going back—then we could *never* explain that it was not owing to any disloyal complaints on our part that we had been thus whisked away.

'Oh, aren't we?' we said, in so spiritless a manner that my mother gazed at us in amazement.

She told us afterwards that she had never been so much disappointed in her life.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

WARMTH and comfort, loving care, and the joys of home soon banished all our vague regrets, and the arrival of two new governesses absorbed our attention.

One was the beloved person known to us as 'J.,' sister to her predecessor; the other was a Frenchwoman, Mlle. de Santerre. These two had a great deal to do with the forming of our minds and the directing of our literary aspirations.

It was dear J. who, taking an immense interest in our first efforts, advised us to seek after simplicity and clearness of style, and to make sure of what we wanted to say before we began to write; while Mademoiselle taught us to observe nature, and, in particular, to take note of the habits of the birds with which our woods teemed.

All was harmony, during both school and play-hours, while this dual reign lasted. I only remember one conflict of wills between Mademoiselle and any of her pupils. Baby, though very small, was beginning to do lessons, and managed to impose on both his instructresses.

Going into the French schoolroom one day, I

found his little chair poised upon the table, and Master Baby sitting, facing the back, his legs being twisted in most complex fashion round the rungs, while he rocked himself perilously backwards and forwards. Mademoiselle was hovering near, distracted between the endeavour to ensure his safety and at the same time impart a small modicum of instruction.

'He assures me,' said Mademoiselle, 'that it is the only way in which he can say his lessons, and that Mees J. always allows him to balance himself like that.'

It is, indeed, quite possible that J. may have allowed a good deal of latitude to the young gentleman during lesson hours, for she adored him. I certainly remember his informing her on one occasion that his feet were so hot he could not possibly do his lessons unless he took his shoes off.

'Very well,' she conceded, and plop, plop went the shoes on the floor. After a minute or two, however, he began to wriggle downwards from his chair, while his feet groped under the table, his eyes meanwhile fixed dreamily on J.'s face.

'What are you doing now, sir?'

'I'm putting on my shoes, J. My feet have got cold.'

'Very well, sir. Then *keep* them on,' said J., with fictitious sternness. The spelling lesson was resumed, and presently a wandering look came into Baby's blue eyes, and plop, plop went the shoes again.

'*Now*, what are you doing, sir?'

'My feet have got hot again now, J. I had to kick off my shoes.'

'Then *keep* them off, sir.'

But in two minutes the whole proceeding was gone through again, and so on *da capo*.

J. never lost her patience, while Baby preserved his assumption of confiding innocence to the end.

But Mademoiselle was not quite so complaisant, and one day Baby, who had been very inattentive during his whole lesson, was relegated to the corner.

'I don't care. It's a very *nice* corner,' said he.

He was in a mischievous mood, and Mademoiselle had no sooner returned to her seat, after marching him towards it and placing him with his face to the wall, than he trotted out again. Three times did she repeat this ceremonial, and three times did he set it at naught. At last, exasperated, she gave him a sharp tap on his little sunburnt hand, and fenced him in with a chair, in which she placed her own portly person. After a quarter of an hour he was released, and she returned to her former station at the table, while we gathered round for 'narration,' or some such task.

Baby, with a crimson face, had marched out into the nursery corridor, and we could hear him tumbling his toys about at the further end. Mademoiselle was sitting with her back to the schoolroom door, which had been left ajar, and

did not see, as we did, this door presently open more widely to admit the avenging figure of Baby, who came striding towards her, brandishing a ninepin which he held by the small end.

We watched him, fascinated, while he flourished it in the air and then brought it down with all the force of his short arm on Mademoiselle's stout shoulder. Having accomplished this fell act, he dropped his weapon and fled, howling, as Mademoiselle overtook him, which she did in three steps. Thereupon condign and richly-deserved chastisement overtook Baby, much to our indignation—though as a matter of fact he never bore her any ill-will for it, and shortly afterwards was quite as ready to chatter to 'Ma-selle' as before.

When Gertie was thirteen, more changes took place. J. was obliged to leave us, on account of her mother's ill-health, and her successor, whom I will call Miss Simpson, did not prove to be a person of very high culture. She was a florid, good-natured, and it must be owned, rather silly woman, whose fluent, but most extraordinary, French provoked the mirth, not only of Mademoiselle but of us, her pupils, and whose taste in music was of an equally odd description.

'You children only seem to play two things nowadays,' observed my mother once. 'One sounds like a jig, and the other like a churn.'

We thought the remark very cruel, and were disposed to be deeply offended, and I think it was

shortly after this that I asked and received permission to give up music.

But Nellie, who had really a remarkable talent, continued to learn pieces of real difficulty, accomplishing the runs with an ease surprising when the shortness of her fingers was considered, but with that jig-like rhythm to which my mother had taken exception, and which was according to Miss S.'s idea.

Mademoiselle was our third mademoiselle, for the first charming woman had been obliged to return to France; while our second, who hailed from Paris and wore little flat curls on her forehead, had found our neighbourhood dull, and had, moreover, as we children instinctively guessed, been disapproved of by my mother. This third Mademoiselle—Bertin, by name—was a dark-eyed, sallow-faced woman of about forty, with a great taste for poetry and all things literary, and an equally strong distaste for fresh air. We disliked the stuffiness of her schoolroom during study hours, but we loved the lessons themselves. She called Lamartine '*Ma*martine,' because of her devotion to him, and I am bound to say, introduced us to some little-known, and as she declared, unpublished lines of his, of which, even as children, we felt the beauty. Under her auspices we acted Racine's *Esther,* Gertie taking the title rôle, while I, clad in imposing robes of striped damask, made from a discarded drawing-room curtain, was

Assuérus the King. But I never had any talent for acting, and was Mademoiselle's despair when I came on, mumbling the opening lines of the soliloquy, which ought to have been declaimed with so much effect. It was true my proceedings were hampered by the fact that my moustache—a small dark one, adroitly contrived by our big brother Johnnie, with springs which were supposed to be affixed to the inside of my nostrils—not only pinched and tickled, but had a tendency to turn sideways if I did not move my lips with caution. Nellie impersonated *Agag* much more effectively, and clung to my knees when imploring for life with a passion which I found embarrassing; while Aggie, as *Hydaspe*, left nothing to be desired. Most of our costumes were made out of furniture material, under the active superintendence of Johnnie, who had a real artistic gift. On looking back I can see that the designs were wonderfully correct.

The entertainment was a great success. All the servants declared that Miss Gertie looked beautiful, and those among our friends and neighbours who witnessed the performance were much struck with our proficiency in French. I can still see poor Mademoiselle crouching in her corner behind the double doors which divided our stage from the library, where the audience were seated, her face livid with excitement, her eyes seeming ready to start from her head while she prompted and coached us:—

'But Marie, then, advance, advance—turn round, they cannot hear you.'

'Mademoiselle, I can't,' I muttered distractedly, 'my moustache is coming off.'

At the end, however, I received my share of the general congratulations, and Mademoiselle, with whom I was a special favourite, was '*aux anges*'; but Miss Simpson, the English governess, was slightly jealous, and took care to inform the rival instructress that she did not consider Racine at all equal to Shakespeare. Those two did not love each other very much, and Mademoiselle, who had a spice of malice, added to a distinct sense of humour, used to feign to misunderstand Miss Simpson's extraordinary French.

I remember the latter disapproving of some buns we had for tea. Miss Simpson expressed a preference for sponge cakes, which she called *gateaux d'éponge*.

'Really!' exclaimed Mademoiselle, pretending to think that Miss Simpson spoke of cakes literally made of sponge, 'I should have thought that would choke people.'

Another time Miss Simpson remarked that she had had a terrible nightmare, describing it as a *cheval de nuit*, and Mademoiselle listened in all seriousness, asking many questions about the strange horse which had, it seemed, visited Miss Simpson during the preceding night.

'How did it get upstairs?' she asked, her little

black eyes flashing wickedly, while we, who knew that Miss Simpson ought to have used the word *cauchemar,* giggled with delight.

Though only thirteen Gertie was now becoming very grown-up in her ways. Not only did she dine late and go to bed at the unheard-of hour of nine, but frequently during study-hours, while we juniors were plodding away at our lessons, she would announce that she was going downstairs to see mamma, and would depart, quite heedless of protests from Miss S. or Mademoiselle. The fact that she was not immediately sent back showed that these visits of hers to my mother's room or the library were not disapproved of; in fact, I think they were rather welcomed, for my mother at this period of her life was very lonely, and had begun to count more and more on the companionship of her eldest daughter. After a long absence Gertie would return with an important air, and condescend to resume her lessons. We, the younger ones, felt rather aggrieved, and no doubt the governesses had some excuse for their ill-concealed indignation at these proceedings. They were certainly not very good for Gertie's education, and my mother may have felt this, or it may have been in accordance with a long-formed plan that she decided to send Gertie to school—to that same charming old-world school in England where she herself had spent many happy years. I was inconsolable at the idea; all my sense of injury at Gertie's privileges vanished,

and I would gladly have kept her at home, even if I had been obliged to do her lessons as well as my own. There was some slight ray of consolation in the fact that I was to accompany her to England, where we were all to stay for a short time with my mother's friend, Ellen, before leaving Gertie behind. Gertie herself, I think, was rather pleased with the idea. During our former brief experience she had entered into the spirit of school life more than Nellie and I. She liked making new friends, and looked forward to studying music and Italian under really good teachers. She had been corresponding with two of Ellen's daughters since her former visit, and was delighted at the prospect of being near them.

During the journey, therefore, it was she who was gay and animated, while I was sunk in gloom.

But gloom was impossible in any house where Ellen P. lived. Her actual home was called Springfield, and indeed the title suited it well, for though old in itself—in fact a rather beautiful survival of Elizabethan architecture—it positively teemed with young life. The family numbered fifteen, some few members of whom were grown up at the time of my visit, while the others descended by regular degrees from the hobbledehoy to a year-old baby. Besides the schoolroom children, with whom Gertie and I were principally concerned, and the nursery children, there was a betwixt-and-between class, called by their mother 'staircase children,'

two or more of whom were always to be encountered whenever one ascended to the upper storey or descended therefrom.

Gertie and I were in a complete state of bewilderment during the first few hours after our arrival. Children of all denominations swarmed about us. Curly-haired Jack, from the nursery, thrust a chubby brown hand into ours, warmly pressing us to ascend to his particular abode. Mabel, one of the younger schoolroom children, burst in upon us while we were sharing the elders' tea, with the excited announcement that a hen had just laid an egg on the top of her head. She had, it seemed, been examining the hen-roost, with this result. We were inclined to doubt her story, but her family declared it to be quite possible, as things happened to 'Mob' which never happened to anyone else. Sybil, a staircase child, a lovely little creature of about eight, brought in her doll, which she shyly thrust into my lap. Such a beautiful doll, with wax head and limbs, and real hair and eyelashes. Being then between eleven and twelve, I was supposed to be too old for dolls, but I dearly loved them, and my heart immediately went out to this one and its owner. On the morrow we were told we should explore the house and be introduced to the 'Ship,' a wonderful old attic, garnished with many beams, where the children were allowed to romp and play in full liberty.

In honour of being visitors, Gertie and I were

allowed to come down to late dinner, a privilege which slightly alarmed me, as I knew that all that part of the family in which I took most interest had already partaken of a substantial schoolroom tea while we were dressing. Moreover, the grown-up members of the party awed me slightly, particularly the master of the house, a tall, imposing-looking personage, whom I had previously only seen for a few moments on his return from hunting.

Much to my joy, however, I discovered, on entering the dining-room, that our two special cronies, Emmie and Alice, were there, neatly attired in white muslin—possibly those very muslins which, not having been made with a sewing-machine, had incurred Gertie's contempt on a previous visit, and of which the tucks would 'let down' the more easily: thrift is a very necessary virtue where there is question of a family of fifteen. But, to our request that each of our special friends would sit next to us, they replied only by smiling and shaking their heads. I soon discovered they were not going to sit anywhere, but were present in the capacity of waitresses, it being quite impossible for the parlourmaid to attend to the party there assembled, nine or ten in number. But very deftly did the little waitresses accomplish their tasks, handing vegetables, removing plates, as quietly and quickly as though they had been trained by a superior butler. When they were not actually ministering to us they stepped back to their respec-

tive places, shaking their magnificent hair out of their eyes—both these girls had hair which came far below their waists and was proportionately thick —occasionally sending a shy smile in our direction.

Three or four days of intense happiness followed—happiness the keener because the shadow of Gertie's impending departure was resolutely kept at bay. We romped and played to our heart's content with our new friends, little and big; roamed round the country with them when it was fine; and when it was wet migrated to the 'Ship,' which gave great scope to the imagination, and where we played such games as would have rejoiced the heart of Barrie himself.

But at last the fateful day came when Gertie was to be separated from me.

We drove to the school, Ellen accompanying us, and my mother and she beguiling the way by talking of their former pranks and follies.

'But *you* mustn't do anything like that,' they would say now and then to Gertie, then almost immediately they would begin again.

'Do you remember, Margaret?'—or 'Oh, Ellen, the jam-tarts.'

And then dear Ellen would wipe her eyes and say: 'Margaret, Margaret, how we have been battered about the world since then.'

At last we arrived at our destination, an Elizabethan house like Springfield, but much larger and more perfect, surrounded by ancient and

beautiful grounds. Everything was beautiful and kindly and dignified, including the mistresses, to whom Gertie was presently introduced. Some of these had been schoolmates of my mother, and all took an interest in her child. We had cake and wine in a panelled parlour, and were then conducted through the house. There were no whitewashed passages here; everything seemed warm and mellow and homely.

Ellen had some nieces in the school, and these were presently summoned—bright-faced girls who at once took possession of Gertie. My mother said one had only to look at them to see how happy they were, and that she felt sure Gertie would be happy too, and Gertie cordially agreed—it was only my heart that felt as heavy as lead. Wandering behind the others, I cried surreptitiously, but so bitterly that when the time came to say good-bye there was no disguising my grief. The dear old lady who had been my mother's teacher in former days thought it was I who was going to school, and endeavoured to console me by promising that I should come and have 'gin' with her. 'Gin' was not the ardent liquor which the word seemed to suggest, but the home-made gingerbread for which the establishment was famous. To have 'gin' with one or other of the authorities was a favour highly appreciated by the girls.

Well, at last I was torn away from Gertie, and hustled into the carriage, where I sat violently

sobbing on the back seat, while Ellen patted my mother's hand, and told her for her consolation that two of her own children—Emma and Alice, in fact—would be going to school in Belgium in a month or two.

'And they will very seldom be able to come home for holidays,' she said wistfully. 'We can't afford to let them come backwards and forwards, and then, of course,' she added, 'Frank' (the eldest of the family then at home) 'is to go out to New Zealand, and I am getting his things ready now.'

It was my mother's turn to pat her hand, divining the unspoken thought: 'I shall never see him again.'

Even I rubbed my eyes with my damp little handkerchief and endeavoured to compose my features. It seemed wrong to cry when I was going to see Gertie again quite soon, and Ellen could be brave in the face of a much greater misfortune.

Nevertheless, my woe-begone appearance evoked a great deal of sympathy on our return to Springfield. Mary, one of the elder girls, took me under her special protection, calling forth thereby my passionate gratitude and admiration.

During the remainder of our visit I followed her about like her devoted little shadow, and I carried away the memory of her charming and bright personality when we left a day or two later.

All my grief was renewed when I actually found myself in the train that was bearing me so many

miles away, not only from Gertie but my new dear friends, and my mother was at her wits' end to know what to do with me.

We were half-way through the hotel dinner in London, where we spent a few days on our way home, when she suddenly proposed we should cheer ourselves up by going to the theatre. I agreed lugubriously enough, though there was a certain sense of elation at going to a grown-up play at such an hour. We were late, and the second act of *The School for Scandal* was proceeding when we took our seats. In consequence I understood very little of the play—which possibly I should have found incomprehensible in any case—but I was interested in spite of myself in the strange costumes, the bowings and scrapings and old-fashioned speech. As a matter of fact I was really witnessing a great artistic triumph, for Farren was playing Sir Peter Teazle, and, child as I was, I was struck by his marvellous power of expression. But though I was curious and interested, and in a way excited, I was conscious throughout of a sense of aching misery that made me almost physically sick. My eyes burned so much I could scarcely look at the stage, and louder than the voices of the players I could hear an inner voice which asked: 'What is Gertie doing now?' and reminded me how dreadful it would be to go home without her

CHAPTER XVII

MISS IN HER TEENS

It was partly, I suppose, because of my grief at separating from Gertie, partly, perhaps, owing to the enlargement of my ideas resulting from the journey to England and the visit to my new friends, and possibly on account of being now the eldest of the home group, that I suddenly ceased to feel myself a child. Indeed, on my twelfth birthday, which took place shortly afterwards, I informed the little ones that I could now no longer be included among the children.

'What do you call yourself, then?' asked mamma, a little quizzically.

'A person of twelve is a little girl,' I replied with dignity. 'You called me yourself "Miss in her teens."'

With a smile she admitted the justice of my reasoning.

I patronised Nellie and Aggie in a way which irritated them extremely. I felt that my adoration for Mary P. lifted me to heights which they were too young to ascend, but now and then I regaled them with sundry anecdotes of my divinity. They were, however, never allowed to glance at the

contents of a certain little tin box which I kept religiously fastened up with a complex arrangement of stamp paper and string, and which bore the following inscription in my best French :—

'Quiconque oserait lire
Ce que ce papier cache;
Permettez-moi de lui dire
Que c'est très indiscret et lâche.'

In this receptacle I enshrined her photograph, a letter or two, and a variety of souvenirs, including a little papier-mâché robin, hollow inside, and once filled with sweets, which she had given me at Springfield. This present had caused me as much anguish as pleasure, as indicating that she considered me quite a child, and that I could, in consequence, never hope to be admitted on equal terms to her friendship. It must have been largely on this account that I made such strenuous efforts to be grown-up.

Yet with all my elderly airs some of my antics were childish enough. Allusion has already been made to Bluebell Wood, where we spent so many happy hours. One particular corner of this wood I now proposed should be called 'New Springfield,' and I suggested that each of us should choose a tree to represent her special playmate in Ellen's family.

After Gertie's first visit to Springfield, she had described the character and appearance of the girls

nearest to us in age, and we had forthwith struck up a friendship with them, corresponding for a year or two before we actually met. I now carved the name 'Alice' on the tree which I had chosen, Alice being my original friend; while Nellie and Aggie respectively scratched 'Dorrie' and 'Mabel' on theirs. My juniors were at first surprised at my selecting another tree for special attention, wreathing it about with flowers, and carpeting the roots with moss. I was very mysterious about this tree, and the word which I carved upon the bark at first puzzled them, YRAM; but they were not long in discovering that it was the inverted name of 'Mary.' I used to sit at the foot of this tree and dream about Mary, often repeating her name to myself, both in its real and transposed form, in the intervals of scribbling reams of fictitious adventures in which she took part. Once, in pagan fashion, I buried a tin box at the foot of this tree, containing sweets and a poem which I had written in her honour. No doubt that box remains to this day, though the name must have been long overgrown and illegible.

In my loneliness I began to make a confidante of Mademoiselle Bertin, whom I found responsive and sympathetic, if somewhat inconveniently affectionate.

Poor Mademoiselle! I discovered one day, much to my perplexity and concern, that in her anxiety to console me for Gertie's absence, and for my

despair at the impossibility of ever being permitted to be a real comrade to Mary P., she aspired to become herself the friend of my bosom. I found a little picture in my French grammar representing two doves linked together by a blue ribbon, with a poem on the back which Mademoiselle had composed for me, and which began thus:—

'Si jamais l'union de l'esprit et du cœur,
Fût du ciel ici-bas le don par excellence,
Mary, serait-ce imprudence
De reconnaître en vous ce gage de bonheur?'

Mademoiselle, yellow with emotion, watched me from the corner of the room while I read it, and embraced me warmly when I thanked her.

'My wish for you,' she said in a trembling voice, 'my wish for you, Mary, is that you may find a friend who will not be too old for you to love, and who will love you as I would love you.'

She clasped me to her stuffy black alpaca bosom as she uttered these words, and I am glad to think that I made every effort to respond with gratitude and warmth; but to say that I could put Mademoiselle in the place of my beautiful Mary was what I could not bring myself to do.

I murmured, with as much enthusiasm as I could: 'Merci, merci, Mademoiselle,' but I found it impossible to say the words for which the poor soul longed.

Nevertheless, we continued on excellent terms as

governess and pupil, and, though she could never be for me my friend of friends, there was very real affection between us. The following lines, written by her in an extraordinarily minute and neat little hand, are still in my possession, and would seem to testify to this fact :—

MARY ET DICKY

Sous un pavillon de verdure,
Entouré de soins et d'amour,
Vivait, bijou de la nature,
Le plus charmant oiseau du jour.

Souvent, plein de reconnaissance,
Pour la main qui le caressait,
Il quittait ce lieu de plaisance,
Et sur cette main s'envolait.

Petit chantre au joyeux langage,
Au gracieux et doux plumage.
' Quel est ton nom ? ' disait Mary,
L'oiseau redoublant son ramage.
Lui répondait : ' Je suis le sage,
L'heureux, le bien-aimé Dicky.'

In the meantime our literary aspirations received a new stimulus from the idea which suddenly occurred to one of us, to bring out a series of complete stories under the title of *The Ivy Home Library*.

We had tired of the *Ivy Home Magazine*, owing to the difficulty already alluded to connected with the serials, but this new project was received with

enthusiasm. I think I must have been the originator, for I was at that time engaged on a long story in several chapters, in which, though it was called *Two Little Sisters,* Mary P. figured as heroine. She appeared as a grown-up cousin of unspeakable beauty and wisdom, adored by the sisters and their friends and, in fact, the arbiter of all their destinies.

I am bound to say that my pencilled portrait of Mildred Unsworth in no way resembled the original, though the chignon was lifelike.

During the ensuing spring we spent many happy rs putting our plan into execution, and we used ead each other the result of our labours on rday afternoons.

We had discovered a new sanctum on penetrating into the waste ground, which had caused Nellie to break off the writing of her most promising serial tale. Making our way across this No-man's-land, we found ourselves in the remains of an orchard at the back of 'Ivy Home.' Wild apple trees grew there, their blossoms filling the air with fragrance, and nut trees, fragrant also in their curious pungent way. In the branches of one of these we used to ensconce ourselves on half-holiday afternoons. We planted wildflowers in the neighbourhood of this tree, and made a little avenue to lead from it to 'Ivy Home.'

The other day I came upon a dusty parcel which had long lain out of sight in a forgotten wardrobe

It proved to contain a number of exercise books and little packets of shiny notepaper, carefully tied up with faded bits of ribbon, and I recognised in the pencilled pages some of my own first compositions. On the fly-leaf of one I found the long list of stories to which I have already alluded: it was, in fact, a list of the works 'published' in *The Ivy Home Library*.

I much wish I could now lay my hands on my sisters' stories, but the only MSS. or portions of MSS. which I can find are my own. A page or two of one called *Evendale Manor* is among the dusty little bundle. It is the opening chapter, and seems to be strongly inspired by Dickens. I recognise with much satisfaction my first attempt to write dialect, though it is a medley of Cockney and Dorset. I transcribe the fragment, such as it is, spelling and all.

'It was Christmas Eve, and the coming of old Father Christmas was signalised by a heavy fall of snow. Snow lay piled on the roadside, on the frozen river, on the housetops of the little village of Evendale, nay! even the Manor itself did not escape, and each grey turret that looked sleepily down on the snowy fields below was clad in a nightcap of the purest white.

'The lord of the manor was away, as the bare flagstaff plainly showed, still there was plenty of merrymaking going on within. The servants had a fidler in the kitchen, and they were dancing and

singing and making a night of it. John, the butler, and Mrs. Elsper, the housekeeper, being too old—as they said—to dance (though between ourselves when they chose they could foot it away with the best of us), sat down to a tête-à-tête in the housekeeper's room, where, with the aid of a blazing fire and a steaming jug of flip, they succeeded in making themselves tolerably comfortable.'

'"*Wot* a hevening it is," said John, after a pause.

'"It was just such an evening as this," sighed the housekeeper, "Christmas eve four year ago, of which this is the Hannie Varsary." (Mrs. Elsper made two words of this and pronounced it with great relish). "Ah, deary me! my poor dear mistress."

'"She be handsome, ain't she?" growled John.

'"Handsome!" ejaculated Mrs. Elsper.

'"And sweet-tempered, ben't she?"

'"Sweet-tempered!" said Mrs. Elsper again. "I never saw the likes of her!"

"Ah," said John, "I never knowed her." '

Two Little Sisters, the work in which I had enshrined the adored one, is a verbose and foolish production, with interminable conversations, all tending to the glorification of my paragon, and a multiplicity of characters created for the same end. Only one of these appears to have any individuality, a small boy called Dick, whose aptitude for Latin

and Greek might have caused him to be a prig, had it not been for a saving and rather precocious sense of humour. This is how he describes the performance of a somewhat affected visitor:

'"*I'll* tell you how she plays. First of all she sits gracefully down to the piano, and says: really, you know, really it is so long since she played, *really* she can't be sure—very well, she'll try, then, if you like. And she begins. A chord, you know, by way of a grand start. Crash! Right hand wrong. Beg your pardon. I think if that candle—oh! thanks so much—crash! left hand wrong, trys again—crash! both hands wrong this time. Rather a bad beginning. Well, with a great deal of pedal she manages to make it go smoothly for a time; then come the runs, squibble, squibble, squibble, squibble, crash!—trys again, squibble, squibble, crash, squibble crash, squibble, crash, crash, awful smash! Then she stops and tells everybody what they knew before, that she doesn't know it a bit; and everybody grins inanely and says: oh, yes, she does, and won't she go on? They like it so much. And she does go on with a virtuous air, as if she could play it perfectly if she chose, but out of consideration for the capabilities of the assembly she condescends to play as she does."'

In the preface to this tale I find an allusion to the

impending change in our lives which took place soon after, and which, as far as I was concerned, decided my ultimate fate. After beginning with a patronising dedication to my own little sisters, taking care, however, to say that they were not to consider the heroines portraits of themselves—a supposition which they repudiated with indignation, I continued in the same grandiloquent style :

'Do you remember, sisters mine, that bright spring morning when we first proposed to write each a tale and call our little collection *The Ivy Home Library?* We were to write them in the bright summer days, and long winter evenings, and then when a twelve-month had elapsed to read them under the old hazel tree. The old year has passed away, and the new year shines bright upon us, but when the anniversary of that bright spring day comes we shall be far away from Ivy Home, and the old hazel tree; the weeds will grow up and choke our wild flowers, and overrun our little avenue. Our life lies in pleasant places, as you well know, and I do not think that we shall miss Ivy Home, nor is it likely that Ivy Home will miss us. Though we shall not be there, still I will carry out in part my intention, and present to you the first volume of—

THE IVY HOME LIBRARY.'

Among the 'pleasant places' alluded to in my incorrect quotation was Brussels, where my mother

decided that we should finish our education. Her idea was to take a house there which was to form our headquarters. We were diligently to pursue our studies under different masters, and to travel during the summer. I have said that the fulfilment of this project had far-reaching effects on my own life: as a matter of fact it was in Brussels that I made acquaintance with the subsequent ruler of my destiny.

One day during the ensuing year, when I was making my way to my drawing-master's house, I saw the bright face of an English fellow-pupil gazing at me from the open window of a lower room. Leaning over her shoulder was a schoolboy, some years older than herself. As I nodded to the little girl I heard the boy murmur in her ear: 'Who is your friend Pasty Face?'

I was growing rather fast at the time, and the day was hot; possibly the rude remark was justified, but in later times the speaker did not like to be reminded of it. For the schoolboy in question was my future husband.

It was during the holidays, when we were all at the seaside, that my mother formed this notable plan. Gertie had come back with a bad cough and a complexion which was rudely stigmatised by some people as 'tallowy'; even a fearful concoction of Mobie's, involving the steeping of rusty keys in sherry, did not restore her roses. It was evident that school life did not suit her, but she grew strong

during the ensuing winter and spring, and in summer we took flight.

What a bustling time of preparation intervened! Besides the trunks already in our possession, six brand-new ones were bought, and Miss Hogan was summoned. Together with Mrs. Daly, she concocted a variety of fearsome garments, which, as a matter of fact we were seldom able to wear. I think my mother must have purchased the materials by the piece, and left Daly to her own devices for the arrangement of them.

I remember two print frocks destined for my own use, one pink and one green—the underskirts were striped, while the overskirts, fashionable in those days, had a pattern of flowers and sprigs. It sounds as if they ought to have been pretty, but as a matter of fact they were frightful. Mrs. Daly assured me with great pride that they were really equivalent to four frocks, as I could wear the pink panniers with the green underskirt and the green over the pink.

Before our departure we had a sale of live stock and implements, for my mother considered that it would be unwise to carry on farming on an extensive scale during her absence. Tiny and Cadichon were turned out to grass, Fussy was sent to the master already mentioned, the birds were handed over to Mobie. All this caused us some few pangs, added to the fact that Mobie went about with her finger to her lip, and was disposed to be rather

short with us, and to be quite sure that we should have forgotten all about her when we came back grand young ladies.

Doctor Taylor, our beloved priest, was also inclined to be a little distant in his manner to my mother, and not to be at all sure that the contemplated change was for our good.

He had a great affection for Baby, between whom and himself there had existed from the very first year of my brother's life a special comradeship. In fact there was one particular joke which provoked intense mirth on both sides, and which had been inaugurated by Baby himself before he could speak.

Baby, having been set on the floor before the dear old man, would, with a preternaturally solemn look, advance a chubby hand. As Doctor Taylor prepared to take it he would suddenly draw it back and present his little fat leg instead. This was cordially shaken amid much hilarity.

As years passed the friendship between Baby and 'Doc-tee Tay' increased, and the priest's weekly arrival in our midst was always hailed by him with special satisfaction.

I cannot close this record of early days in our old home without a word or two about this dear friend and father.

He seemed to us fabulously old, with his shock of snow-white hair and kind hard-featured face, seamed with a thousand wrinkles; but the eyes which looked at us through the silver-rimmed

spectacles were sympathetic as well as keen, and the mouth always ready to break into good-natured and humorous smiles. None of our small concerns were too petty to interest him, and every week he used to make minute inquiries into our progress. We played our pieces for him, recited the poems we had learnt, and sometimes thrust our own compositions shyly into his hands. He would even inspect our dolls, though I remember on one occasion when Aggie—then very small—produced a little china one in an entirely nude state, he restored it her with the hasty remark: 'Oh faith, my dear! Keep her till you dress her!'

We used to listen enthralled while he and my mother discussed books. Both were great readers. He admired Scott as much as we did, shared our enthusiasm for Dickens, and was convulsed by Mark Twain.

Once when Dickens gave readings of his works in Dublin, my mother took the dear Doctor to hear him, and she was as much delighted with his appreciation of this humorous treat as with the entertainment itself.

They sat in one of the front rows, and it was not long before the Doctor's ecstatic 'Ha-ha!' attracted the reader's attention. He glanced down and saw the old man hanging on his words, his eyes shining, his face wreathed with expectant smiles; his big hand clasping the silk handkerchief which was presently to wipe the tears of mirth from his

eyes, evidently breathlessly waiting for the anticipated point—a point which he had so often gloated over in private.

My mother declared that a responsive light came into Dickens' eyes, and that, during the remainder of the evening, when he was about to deliver some specially exquisite sally, he would glance quickly downwards to observe its effect on this appreciative auditor.

Besides his books, and a somewhat ancient and crabbed housekeeper, and a male factotum—who was an odd man in every sense of the word—the Doctor's chief companions were his dogs, of which a little Scotch terrier called Chatty was his special favourite. He used to regale us with anecdotes of Chatty's sagacity. Needless to say Chatty 'could do all but speak,' and the Doctor, indeed, carried on one-sided conversations with the little animal, much as George Eliot's Bartle Massey conversed with Vic.

He used to drive miles round the country, seeing the sick and poor in the remotest parts of his big parish, exposing himself for years to all stress of weather, until my mother presented him with a strange vehicle known as an 'inside car,' the use of which prolonged his life for many years.

He had a queer old horse which hobbled up hill and down dale with amazing powers of 'houlding out,' as the factotum before-mentioned averred, though the latter drove after a fashion of his own,

'deluthering the poor baste' with encouraging words.

Once in getting down to open a gate his master heard him announcing: 'It's home we're goin' now, Barney.'

Whereupon, rising with difficulty upon the sloping seat, the old gentleman thrust his head through the window: 'Didn't you hear me say, Mick, we'd go next to poor Pat Brophy at the Heath?'

'To be sure I did, your Reverence, but I'm not lettin' on that to Barney!'

The dear old Doctor dined and slept, according to his custom, the night before our departure, and stood on the steps of the portico to watch us go, waving the red handkerchief which, when we had vanished down the avenue, would be perhaps used to wipe away tears that were not of mirth.

Mobie stood in the background, finger to lip, while Dadgy, the queer old housemaid who was so passionately devoted to Baby, stood scratching her elbows and openly snivelling. But Coss drove us away with a flourish—was not he to join us presently, when we should have settled down, with the carriage and a new pair of horses?

Red-headed Maggie ran out to open the gate, Mrs. Coss and Mary stood behind her wishing us, rather tremulously, 'Safe home!' Poor Mrs. Coss, poor Maggie and Mary, poor everybody who was not going to see the world like us!